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# THE NEW YORKER



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# THE NEW YORKER

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# FALL HIGHLIGHTS

## TALKS & READINGS



Gloria & Emilio Estefan with Rita Moreno  
MON, OCT 19



Ted Koppel with Charlie Rose  
WED, OCT 28



Rod Stewart  
THU, OCT 29



David Mitchell  
TUE, NOV 3



John Irving  
THU, NOV 5



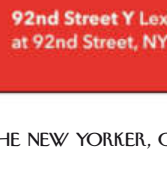
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks  
SUN, NOV 8



Shonda Rhimes  
MON, NOV 9



Alan Zweibel with Martin Short  
MON, NOV 16



Alex Gibney and Lawrence Wright with Janice Min  
WED, DEC 2



Judith Light with Jeffrey Tambor  
MON, DEC 14



Sir John Richardson & Gijs van Hensbergen: On Picasso  
TUE, DEC 15

## CONCERTS



Stefan Jackiw, violin  
Jeremy Denk, piano  
New York Polyphony, vocal ensemble  
CHARLES IVES' four violin sonatas  
SAT, NOV 21



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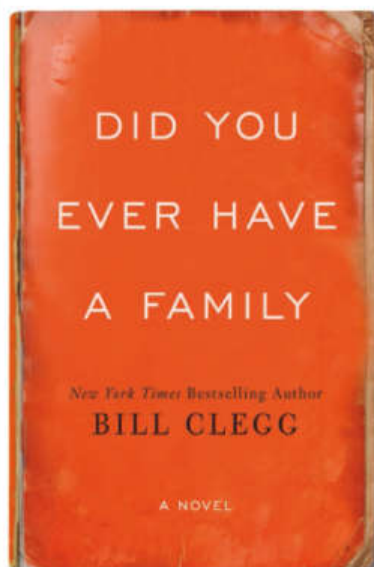
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**MALCOLM GLADWELL** ("THRESHOLDS OF VIOLENCE," P. 30) has been writing for the magazine since 1994. His books include "David and Goliath" and "Outliers."

**AMY DAVIDSON** (COMMENT, P. 25), a staff writer, contributes regularly to Comment.

**CORA FRAZIER** (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 39) has written humor pieces for *The New Yorker* since 2012.

**KATHRYN SCHULZ** ("POND SCUM," P. 40) became a staff writer earlier this year. She is the author of "Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error."

**JANE KRAMER** ("ROAD WARRIOR," P. 46), the author of "Europeans" and "The Politics of Memory," has written for the magazine since 1964. A collection of her *New Yorker* food essays is due out next year.

**ADAM SHATZ** ("DRAWING BLOOD," P. 58) is a contributing editor at *The London Review of Books*.

**ANTON YAKOVLEV** (POEM, P. 64) is the author of the poetry chapbooks "Neptune Court" and "The Ghost of Grant Wood," which comes out later this year.

**BEN MARCUS** (FICTION, P. 68) edited the anthology "New American Stories," which was published in July. "Leaving the Sea" is his most recent short-story collection.

**CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT** (A CRITIC AT LARGE, P. 81) is a staff writer and the author of "Roth Unbound." Her new book, "American Rhapsody," is due out in the spring.

**ED PARK** (BOOKS, P. 87), the author of the novel "Personal Days," is an executive editor at Penguin Press.

**ADRIAN TOMINE** (COVER) is a cartoonist and an illustrator. His new book, "Killing and Dying," has just been published.

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EVERYTHING IN THE MAGAZINE, AND MORE  
THAN FIFTEEN ORIGINAL STORIES A DAY.

#### ALSO:

**DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT:** Opinions and reflections by *Nathan Heller*, *Jeffrey Toobin*, and others.

**DOCUMENT:** An excerpt from "The Arab of the Future," *Riad Sattouf's* graphic memoir of the Middle East.

**FICTION:** *Ben Marcus* reads his story.

**VIDEO:** *Gloria Steinem* on why she doesn't drive. Plus, talks and panels from The New Yorker Festival, including "The Fire This Time," about black identity in America, with *Ta-Nehisi Coates*, *Danai Gurira*, *Claudia Rankine*, *David Simon*, and *Jesse Williams* in conversation with *Jelani Cobb*.

**PODCASTS:** On the Political Scene, *Margaret Talbot* talks with *Dorothy Wickenden* about *Bernie Sanders*. On *Out Loud*, *Alex Ross* and *Richard Brody* join *David Haglund* and *Amelia Lester* for a discussion about the life and work of *Orson Welles*.

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# THE MAIL

## POETIC JUSTICE

I read Alec Wilkinson's piece on the conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith with history in mind ("Something Borrowed," October 5th). The twentieth-century Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid was experimenting with poetic collage nearly a century ago, in the nineteen-twenties; an early example is his long poem "To Circumjack Cencrastus" (1930). The technique became more and more apparent in his lengthy later works, such as "The Kind of Poetry I Want," and "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn" (1943), reaching its culmination in "In Memoriam James Joyce," published in 1955. Where does plagiarism end and creativity (O.K., "uncreativity") begin? MacDiarmid got into some trouble for his poem "Perfect," lifted holus-bolus from a short story by Glyn Jones. And yet, in its new form and context, it has a magical identity of its own. One can always assemble fashionable rationales for the use of a poetic technique, but it's rare to find a new one. Wilkinson used as an example of concrete poetry a poem about an angel printed in the form of an angel's wings. George Herbert did that with "Easter Wings"—in 1633.

*John Baglow*  
Ottawa, Ontario

When Wilkinson wrote to me asking about Goldsmith's performance of "The Body of Michael Brown," the appropriated autopsy report, I called attention to a simple fact: conceptual poetry, as institutionalized in academia, has involved mostly white authors. The reaction to Goldsmith's reading, at Brown University, occurred within that context. Is it possible to have a constructive discussion of race in relation to contemporary poetry? I think it is. Structural racism persists in the academic world; the number of people who make it to college remains split along color lines, and this has led *U.S. News and World Report* to conclude that education in America remains separate and unequal. My comments about racism were not grounded in feelings of individual ex-

clusion, as Wilkinson seems to suggest. Goldsmith's work needs to be evaluated by taking into account the complex role of race in contemporary poetry, and its context within national conversations about race. Many African-American poets objected to Goldsmith's performance, and their voices are almost entirely absent from Wilkinson's piece. The African-American poetry community merited more serious engagement than it got in the article. Just as troubling, the piece comments on a broad social problem having to do with racial inequality and reduces it to an individual grudge by a person of color.

*Tan Lin*  
Professor of English  
New Jersey City University  
Jersey City, N.J.

What stood out to me as I was reading Wilkinson's piece was a single adverb: "He's received more attention lately than any other living poet," Cathy Park Hong, a poet and a professor at Sarah Lawrence, told me *resentfully*. (The emphasis is mine.) I teach writing to undergraduates, and occasionally my students try to put their thumbs on the scales in this fashion; I dissuade them from doing so. Hong, with whom I am acquainted, does not shrink from strong public statements, and I don't always agree with everything she says. But she is an acute and perceptive thinker about poetry, an imaginative editor who is breathing new life into *The New Republic*, and a formidable poet. She is also quite right to suggest to Wilkinson that the time for white male writers blithely to ignore the concerns of others is past. Wilkinson, with his quote selection and commentary, sketched a depiction of Hong that I could not help but read resentfully.

*John Beer*  
Portland, Ore.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto:themail@newyorker.com). Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.

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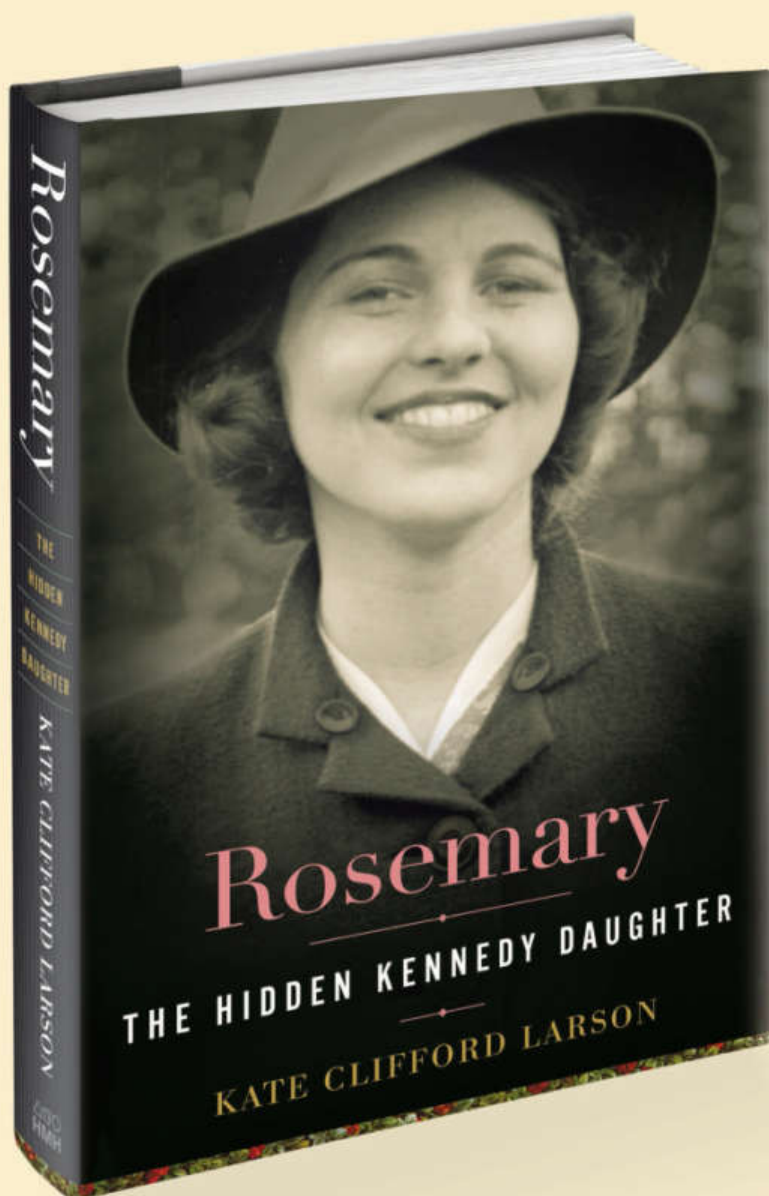
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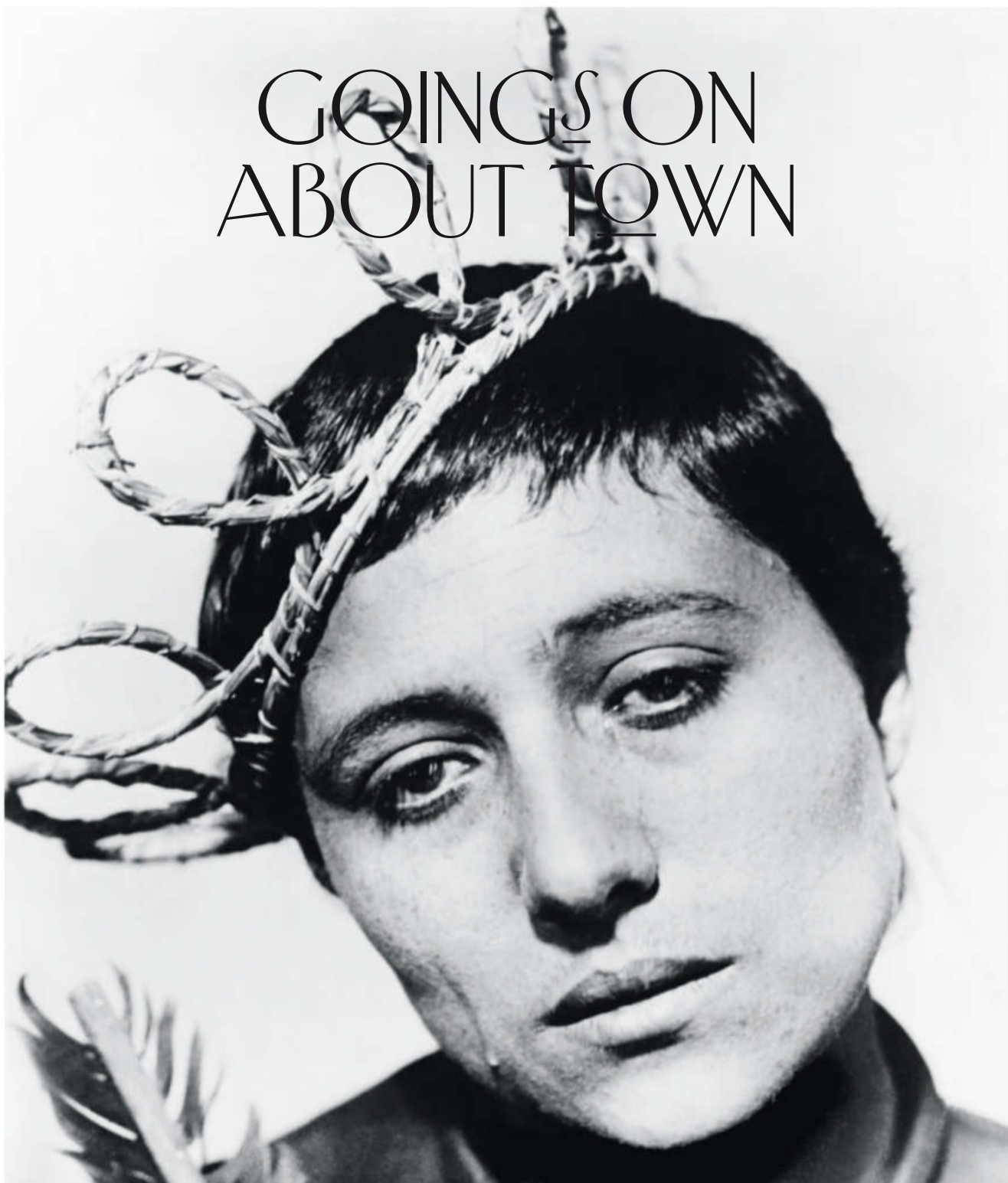
of Rose and Joe Kennedy's tragic misunderstanding of their oldest daughter's capabilities, and of how her fate changed the Kennedy family forever. And yet it is Rosemary herself who shines from the pages of this profoundly revealing family story.”

—MARYA HORNBACHER, author of *Madness: A Bipolar Life*



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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



OCTOBER 2015    WEDNESDAY 14TH    THURSDAY 15TH    FRIDAY 16TH    SATURDAY 17TH    SUNDAY 18TH    MONDAY 19TH    TUESDAY 20TH

**CARL THEODOR DREYER**, one of cinema's first great auteurs, had nothing to do with the original musical scoring of "The Passion of Joan of Arc," his stark, silent masterpiece from 1928, and was never quite satisfied with any of the music that was subsequently attached to it. Over the years, the film has been shown with music in all sorts of styles, including post-minimalist, indie rock, and Baroque pastiche. But the Orlando Consort, the renowned early-music vocal ensemble, has devised a radical solution. This week, Miller Theatre will screen the film twice (Oct. 14 and Oct. 16), with live accompaniment provided by the singers, who will perform sacred works from the early fifteenth century by Dufay, Billart, and others—some of which young Joan, who never missed a Mass, may actually have heard.

ART | THE THEATRE  
MOVIES | NIGHT LIFE  
CLASSICAL MUSIC | DANCE  
ABOVE & BEYOND  
FOOD & DRINK



# ART

## MUSEUMS SHORT LIST METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Ancient Egypt Transformed: The Middle Kingdom."  
Through Jan. 24.

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**  
"Walid Raad." Through Jan. 31.

**MOMA PSI**  
"Greater New York."  
Through March 7.

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**  
"Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting." Through Jan. 6.

**WHITNEY MUSEUM**  
"Jared Madere." Opens Oct. 16.

**BROOKLYN MUSEUM**  
"Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World."  
Through Jan. 3.

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY**  
"The Butterfly Conservatory."  
Through May 29.

**BRONX MUSEUM**  
"E. J. McAdams: Trees Are Alphabets." Through Feb. 27.

**COOPER-HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM**  
"Pixar: The Design of Story."  
Through Aug. 7.

**FRICK COLLECTION**  
"Andrea del Sarto: The Renaissance Workshop in Action." Through Jan. 10.

**NEW MUSEUM**  
"Jim Shaw: The End Is Here."  
Through Jan. 10.

**NOGUCHI MUSEUM**  
"Museum of Stones."  
Through Jan. 10.

**GALLERIES SHORT LIST  
UPTOWN**  
Rineke Dykstra / Jeff Wall  
Marian Goodman  
24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.  
Opens Oct. 20.

"Desdemona for Celia by Hilton"  
Gallery Met  
Metropolitan Opera House,  
Lincoln Center. 212-799-3100.  
Through Jan. 2.

"No Gate, No Lock,  
No Bolt: The Dobkin Family  
Collection of Feminist History"  
Rare  
17 W. 54th St. 646-559-0499.  
Opens Oct. 14.

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Jewish Museum

"The Power of Pictures: Early Soviet Photography, Early Soviet Film"

At what point does avant-garde art become totalitarian propaganda? A big, handsomely installed show of work by the photographers, filmmakers, and graphic designers who defined the radically modern aesthetic of the Russian Revolution conveys the subtle and wrenching erosion of artistic freedoms that occurred between the establishment of the Soviet Union, in the early nineteen-twenties, and Stalin's consolidation of power, a decade later. Alexander Rodchenko and El Lissitzky set the tone for a host of other artists whose dynamic work used constructivist-style skewed angles and cinematic-montage effects to engage a largely illiterate population in the optimism and ambition of the new guard. But these arresting, abstracted compositions gradually gave way—under the pressures of Stalinist repression and censorship—to pictures of massed soldiers, parading athletes, and happy peasants; the avant-garde adventure ended with the seeds of socialist realism. Vitrites stocked with inventively designed publications and a room hung with sensational posters for some of the films screened continuously here are souvenirs of a radical sensibility that was quashed along with the revolution that shared its brilliance. Through Feb. 7.

### Morgan Library & Museum "Ernest Hemingway: Between Two Wars"

This packed exhibition, drawn largely from the collection of Boston's John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, presents the adjective-averse Nobel Prize winner as a perfectionist and a pack rat. The young Hemingway, who was named Class Prophet in his 1917 high-school yearbook (he was also in the trapeze club), went to war in 1918, and then remained in Europe for years. His parents were unimpressed with his choices, but, as he wrote in a hand-scribbled letter to his father, "if it is all beautiful you cant believe in it. Things aren't that way." Hemingway's diligent, even obsessive work habits are evidenced by manuscripts covered with cross outs, marginalia-ringed typescripts, lists of titles for unwritten works ("Romance Is Dead: To Hell It Is"), and several of the dozen drafted endings for "A Farewell to Arms." There are also artifacts from friends and collaborators, including a letter from Dorothy Parker, which accompanied the draft of a Profile she wrote about Hemingway for a 1929 issue of this magazine. She apparently thought it was beneath her standards. "Part of the Artist's Reward," she wrote, "is having shit like this written about you." Through Jan. 31.



In her exuberant show at the Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery, the American painter Keltie Ferris includes works on paper (such as "Robot," above) for which her body became a tool—both a printmaking plate and a paintbrush.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Danny Lyon

In 1967, the twenty-five-year-old photographer, who was already known for his work with the civil-rights movement and his book on the Chicago Outlaws motorcycle gang, embedded himself in Texas prisons for more than fourteen months. The resulting pictures indict a brutal, dehumanizing system in which inmates were treated like slaves. The project's strength—seen in thirty-three extraordinary vintage prints—is how it balances images of field labor, shakedowns, and strip searches with more private moments. Given one-on-one access to prisoners, Lyon put a human face on an inhumane system. Through Oct. 17. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)

### Gianni Piacentino

The Italian artist, now seventy, was in his early twenties when he created the earliest painted-wood works in this show: a dull-pink "X," the Greek letter pi in dark blue, two apricot vertical bars. While those pithy sculptures have affinities with American minimalism of the same era (the mid-sixties), Piacentino

was more interested in innovations in phenomenology. A fantastic recent sculpture takes the form of a simplified speed racer, two gleaming wheels of nickel-plated steel joined to a triangular body. It sports his initials, "GP," a signature as proud and unabashed as Picasso's—or Alfa Romeo's. Through Oct. 31. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

### Leon Polk Smith

Born in Oklahoma in 1906, when it was still known as Indian territory, the American painter moved to New York City in 1936, and stayed until his death, thirty years later. His distilled geometries from the early nineteen-sixties can suggest a hybrid of Pop art and Op art; seen from certain angles, the compositions appear to warp the flat plane of the canvas. But Smith was a hard-line modernist who favored the pared-down approach of Piet Mondrian and the serpentine lines of Matisse, whose cutouts are clearly a touchstone. In turn, there are those who speculate that Smith's interlocking shapes of bright, solid color influenced the young Ellsworth Kelly. Through

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Oct. 31. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-6780.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Jill Freedman

This exhibition includes pictures from London, Cannes, and Miami Beach, but New York is Freedman's true beat, and she works it with the relish of a tabloid reporter. Weegee is the presiding influence on a terrific show of fifty-some black-and-white prints made between 1967 and 1995, but even when she's snapping men passed out on the sidewalk or under arrest, Freedman seems more complicit than predatory. She identifies with the outsiders and the dispossessed—with protestors and carnies, the downcast go-go dancer, and the old naked man in a revolving door. Always on the verge of rediscovery, her work is tough and touching and shot through with pitch-dark

humor. Through Oct. 24. (Kasher, 515 W. 26th St. 212-966-3978.)

### Rita McBride

If you've visited the Barnes Foundation, in Philadelphia, and admired the eccentric arrangements of vintage hardware as much as you have the Impressionist paintings, this show's for you. McBride, a mid-career sculptor with a long-standing interest in industrial templates and typologies, exhibits flat metal objects, some fifty in all, based on old-fashioned keys, door knockers, and locks from locales as far flung as India, Afghanistan, and Ontario. The decorative filigree on a freestanding brass screen is, in fact, a pattern of keyholes. The excised pieces of metal hang in two tidy rows on a nearby wall—negative space given physical form and portraits of peeks through locked doors. Through Oct. 24. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Artie Vierkant

In 2010, while pursuing his master's degree in photography, the artist wrote an influential essay, titled "The Image Object Post-Internet." (The format alone drove home Vierkant's point that distinctions between the physical and the virtual are now moot: the text was distributed digitally, as a PDF, with the option to print on two standard sizes of paper.) Soon he was producing his own "image objects," in which a sculpture was as good as a JPG; colorful files are printed onto aluminum panels, which are then photographed and distorted into new images, which are printed as new objects, ad infinitum. A few details here—Vierkant's name on the wall of a German gallery, a collapsed bicycle in a rainstorm—ground the works in the so-called real world while still underscoring

the porousness of life lived online and off. Through Oct. 17. (Mesler/Feuer, 30 Orchard St. 212-608-6002.)

### "Pangrammar"

Twenty-six letter-based art works spell out the famous pangram "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." Mel Bochner's small painting of a drippy white "Z" nestles next to a poster of a lowercase "A" by his onetime professor Jack Stauffacher; a fine cyanotype print by Robin Cameron conjoins impressions of gears and blocks into an ornery "Q." (The "P" and "S" of "jumps" are cleverly provided by Elaine Lustig Cohen's 1966 cover design for the now-iconic show "Primary Structures.") Punctuating the end of the sentence is a footnote of sorts, a projected animation of a gyrating star by the publishing collective Dexter Sinister. Through Nov. 1. (PI, 334 Broome St. 212-334-5200.)

# THE THEATRE



## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### Allegiance

Lea Salonga and George Takei star in a musical based on Takei's childhood experiences in Japanese-American internment camps, written by Marc Acito, Jay Kuo, and Lorenzo Thione. Stafford Arima directs. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Before Your Very Eyes

The European collective Gob Squad stages a play based on observations of New York kids, in which seven characters fast-forward from adolescence to old age as the audience watches from behind one-way mirrors. Previews begin Oct. 17. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

### Dada Woof Papa Hot

Scott Ellis directs a play by Peter Parnell ("QED"), in which two gay couples with kids navigate the pitfalls of urban parenting. Previews begin Oct. 15. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

### First Daughter Suite

Michael John LaChiusa's new musical imagines the inner lives of Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Patti Davis, Amy Carter, and other Presidential daughters. With Rachel Bay Jones, Mary Testa, and Barbara Walsh. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

### Futurity

Sarah Benson directs a new musical by César Alvarez and his indie band, the Lisps, in which a Civil War soldier and a mathematical genius try to invent a machine that will create utopia. In previews. Opens Oct. 20. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

### Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King

Minhaj, the comedian and "Daily Show" correspondent, performs a solo show about being a first-generation Indian-American. Previews begin Oct. 15. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

### Helen Lawrence

At the Next Wave Festival, Stan Douglas directs a multimedia piece set in nineteen-forties Vancouver, in which the actors perform in front of blue screens that project seedy film-noir settings. Oct. 14-17. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

### Hir

In a new comedy by the performance artist Taylor Mac, directed by Nigel Smith, a young man returns home from the military to his transgender brother and his mother (Kristine Nielsen), who has decided to take down the patriarchy. Previews

begin Oct. 16. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

### Kill Floor

LCT3 presents a new play by Abe Kogler, directed by Lila Neugebauer, in which an ex-con (Marin Ireland) finds work at a slaughterhouse and tries to reconnect with her teen-age son, a staunch vegetarian. In previews. Opens Oct. 19. (Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

### King Charles III

Tim Pigott-Smith stars in Mike Bartlett's speculative play in blank verse, directed by Rupert Goold, which imagines Prince Charles's ascent to the British throne. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Perfect Arrangement

In Topher Payne's comedy, directed by Michael Barakiva for Primary Stages, two couples recast their lives like a sitcom amid the lavender scare of the nineteen-fifties. In previews. Opens Oct. 15. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

### Ripcord

Marylouise Burke and Holland Taylor star in a new comedy by David Lindsay-Abaire, directed by David Hyde Pierce for Manhattan Theatre Club, about two women in assisted living who are forced to share a room. In previews. Opens Oct. 20. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

### Rothschild & Sons

Robert Cuccioli plays the patriarch of the Rothschild banking dynasty, in a new version of the 1970 musical "The Rothschilds," by Jerry Bock, Sheldon Harnick, and Sherman Yellen. In previews. Opens Oct. 18. (York Theatre

at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

### Songbird

Based on Chekhov's "The Seagull," Lauren Pritchard and Michael Kimmel's new musical follows a fading country star (Kate Baldwin) who returns home to Nashville. Previews begin Oct. 20. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### Sylvia

Annaleigh Ashford, Matthew Broderick, and Julie White star in Daniel Sullivan's revival of the A. R. Gurney comedy, about a New York couple and their dog. In previews. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

## NOW PLAYING

### Cloud Nine

James Macdonald's timely revival reminds us just how prescient Caryl Churchill's 1979 play was. Written while shockwaves from the cultural upheavals of the nineteen-sixties and seventies were still roiling British culture—feminism, decolonization, gay liberation—it imagines what a world without the hegemonic myths of empire, patriarchy, and family would look like. The arch first act, set in Victorian-era Africa, maps the fissures where ideology would crack: repressed yearnings, straitened gender roles, rigid hierarchies. Eloquent cross-casting reveals politics beneath identity: a self-hating African subject is played by a white man; a young boy who wants desperately to indulge his maternal side is acted by a woman. In Act II, which flashes forward to nineteen-seventies England, there's less friction between desire and expression, but the disintegration of hard certainties



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Davenport

**DAMES AT SEA**

Helen Hayes

**ECLIPSED**

Public

**THE FLICK**

Barrow Street Theatre

**FOOL FOR LOVE**

Samuel J. Friedman.  
(Reviewed in this issue.)

**FULFILLMENT**

Flea. Through Oct. 19.

**FUN HOME**

Circle in the Square

**THE GIN GAME**

Golden

**HAMILTON**

Richard Rodgers

**HAMLET IN BED**

Rattlestick

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**THE HUMANS**

Laura Pels

**THE KING AND I**

Vivian Beaumont

**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S**  
**DREAM**

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**THE NEW MORALITY**

Mint

**ON YOUR FEET!**

Marquis

**PLEASE EXCUSE MY DEAR**  
**AUNT SALLY**

59E59

**REREAD ANOTHER**

The Brick. Through Oct. 17.

**ROMANCE LANGUAGE**

Theatre 511 at Ars Nova

**SOMETHING ROTTEN!**

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leaves a nuclear-family-shaped void. Haunted by the past, we're still improvising the answers. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

**Fondly, Collette Richland**

This new work from Elevator Repair Service has an original script (albeit one that draws on Jane Bowles's writing) by Sibyl Kempson, but the staging, by John Collins, is riddled with familiar stylistic tricks, suggesting that the avant-garde company has hit a brick wall. We're at the home of Mabrel and "Fritz" Fitzhubert (Laurena Allan and Vin Knight). As the couple sit down to dinner, a man called Local Representative Wheatsun (Greig Sargeant) appears at their door. When Mabrel's sister Winnifr'd Bexell (Kate Benson) enters and begins to interrogate the Representative, we're amused, briefly, until we realize that we feel less than we should for Winnifr'd—or for the other characters. Kempson has adopted Bowles's interest in stereotypes, but her imitation feels clamorous and hollow, especially when you consider how calmly yet hilariously Bowles rendered her fantastic and fanatical worlds. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/12/15.) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

**Old Times**

"No two women are the same," Anna (the dynamite Eve Best) tells Deeley (Clive Owen), in Harold Pinter's enigmatic drama from 1971. She's talking about bodies, but she could just as easily be talking about identities, which blur and refract in the course of the play's hour-and-change duration. Anna is visiting the rural home of Deeley and his wife, Kate (Kelly Reilly), her onetime friend and roommate. Anna is as sensuous as Kate is demure, but they may well be two versions of the same woman—if Anna isn't a ghost or a

memory or a projection. Pinter doesn't supply any answers, suspending the action between reality and dream, past and present. The Roundabout's production, directed by Douglas Hodge (with appropriately disorienting music by Thom Yorke), marks Owen's Broadway debut, and the debonair actor shows uncharacteristic moments of excitability. Who knew it would take Pinter to get him all worked up? (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

**The Quare Land**

A County Cavan farmhouse set revolves to reveal the ninety-year-old Hugh Pugh (Peter Maloney) in the bathtub of a filthy attic, immersed in bubbles and the music of Bobby Darin. His solitary soak is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Rob McNulty (Rufus Collins), a builder who has a proposition, though it takes the younger man some time to reveal its nature, as Hugh spins out a nearly continuous verbal string of history, fantasy, song, invective, and politics. John McManus's ninety-minute play, directed by Ciarán O'Reilly for the Irish Rep, contains elements of vaudeville, absurdism, and Pinteresque uncertainty—and is a little uneven for all that—but its reversals bring big laughs, as well as discomfiting menace. Cementing his position as one of the stage's great comedians, Maloney fully embodies the playwright's seriocomic vision of the Irish character: loquacious, shrewd, stubborn, and quite mad. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.)

**Sisters' Follies:**

**Between Two Worlds**

A ghost story, a joint biography, a spoof, a travesty, and an avant-garde puppet show with occasional songs and nudity, this revue celebrates the lives and deaths of the Henry Street Playhouse's founders, the sibling philanthropists

Alice and Irene Lewisohn, who opened its doors a century ago. Directed by the newly minted MacArthur Fellow Basil Twist and performed by the drag icon Joey Arias and the burlesque queen Julie Atlas Muz, the show unfurls in that same Playhouse and applies a follies-style format to the sisters' greatest hits and misses. (Well, imagine the follies with more boobs and a talking proscenium.) The playful staging is delectable, if sometimes indulgent, and the sympathy between Muz, with her gonzo sensuality, and Arias, with his exultant perversity, is assured. Twist's puppetry—ghosts, fish, Hebrew tribesmen—is a miracle. But the result is oddly minor, so local in its ambit that it almost disappears. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

**Spring Awakening**

In 2006, Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater translated Frank Wedekind's fin-de-siècle German drama, about teen-agers discovering their sexuality in a pious and ignorant society, into the explosive language of indie rock. Deaf West Theatre adds another layer of translation in its stirring and imaginative revival, directed by Michael Arden and featuring a mixed cast of deaf and hearing actors. Now Melchior (the fresh-faced Austin P. McKenzie) signs as he sings, and Wendla, his young lover, is played by two performers, one who signs (Sandra Mae Frank) and one who sings and plays guitar in the shadows (Katie Boeck). While this disembodied effect drains some of the rock numbers of their cathartic power, the signing doubles exquisitely as choreography and heightens one of the show's subtler themes: that language—sexual or otherwise—will find a way, even in a fearful, repressive world. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)



Benedict Cumberbatch's title performance in "Hamlet," at the Barbican Centre, has caused a sensation in London. Lyndsey Turner's production will be broadcast in select cinemas on Oct. 15, as part of the "National Theatre Live" series.



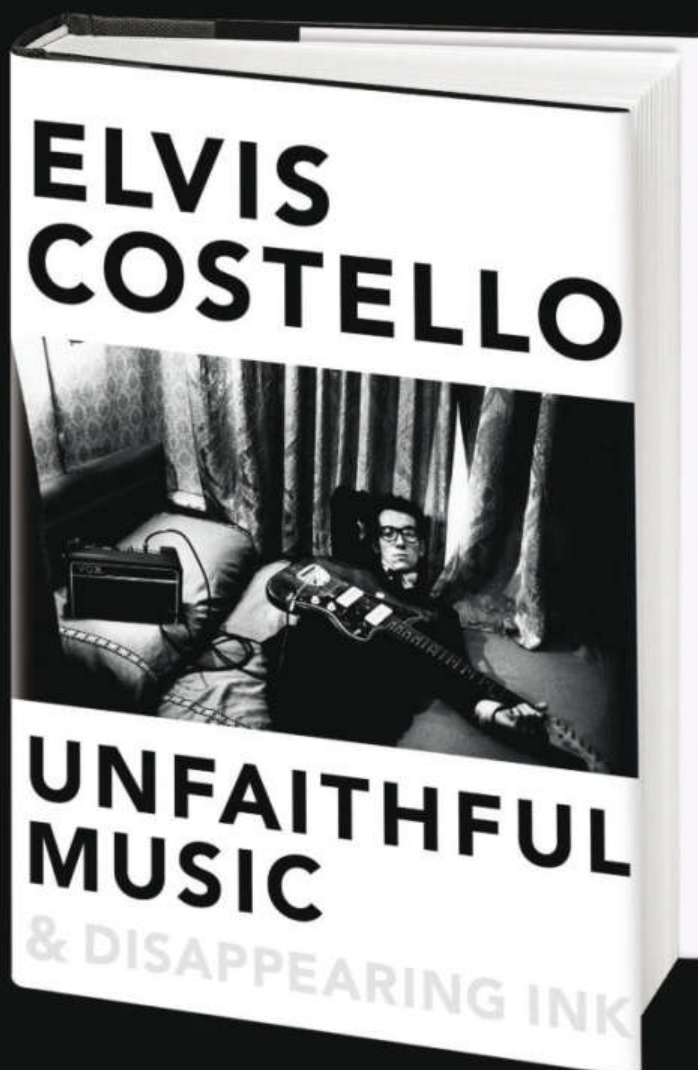
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# X MOVIES

## OPENING

### THE ASSASSIN

Reviewed in Now Playing.  
Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)

### BRIDGE OF SPIES

Steven Spielberg directed this thriller, about the U-2 incident of 1960, centered on a lawyer (Tom Hanks) who negotiates the release from the Soviet Union of the American pilot Francis Gary Powers. Opening Oct. 16. (In wide release.)

### CRIMSON PEAK

Guillermo del Toro directed this horror film, about a writer (Mia Wasikowska) whose husband (Tom Hiddleston) harbors mysteries. Opening Oct. 16. (In wide release.)

### EXPERIMENTER

A docu-drama, about the psychologist Stanley Milgram's 1961 effort to demonstrate obedience to authority. Directed by Michael Almereyda. Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)

### FIELD NIGGAS

Reviewed in Now Playing.  
Opening Oct. 16. (Made in NY Media Center by IFP.)

### MEADOWLAND

Reed Morano directed this drama, about a couple whose son is kidnapped. Starring Olivia Wilde and Luke Wilson. Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)

### ROOM

Lenny Abrahamson directed this drama, based on the novel by Emma Donoghue, about a mother (Brie Larson) and her child (Jacob Tremblay) who are held captive for seven years in a remote shed. Opening Oct. 16. (In limited release.)



### MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Glauber Rocha's "Antonio das Mortes," from 1969, in our digital edition and online.

## NOW PLAYING

### The Assassin

The director Hou Hsiao-hsien's historical drama, set in ninth-century China, fuses political struggles and family grudges into images of a sumptuous stillness, which he punctuates with spasms of extravagant martial artistry. The protagonist, Yinniang (Qi Shu), was engaged to her cousin Tian Ji'an (Chen Chang), a regional governor who resisted China's central authority. When his family broke its promise and sent her into exile, Yinniang became a swordswoman of legendary skill. Now working for the dynastic regime, she is sent to kill Tian Ji'an and quell the rebellion. In Hou's cool and subtle vision, the gold and crimson royal furnishings seem to drip with blood. The silences of closed spaces hint at the clamor of future wars, and Yinniang's comings and goings, through layers of curtains or under the cover of woods, play like supernatural incarnations of destiny. Scenes of dialectical strategizing, however, are flattened and thinned out; the conflict, thrust into the foreground, is stripped of its psychology. The movie often resembles a Western, with warriors on horseback crossing majestic, contested landscapes. At its most persuasive, it conjures live-action versions of classical Chinese paintings, as if Hou were more at ease with the settings and stakes than with the personalities. In Mandarin.—*Richard Brody* (In limited release.)

### Beasts of No Nation

Exchanging one bleakness for another, Cary Joji Fukunaga ("True Detective") shifts from the backwaters of Louisiana to a nameless African war zone. The family life of the young Agu (Abraham Attah) comes to a curt end when his father and brother are slain by invading troops and his mother and sister are forced to leave their home. This all occurs with such sudden vehemence that we have no more idea about the shape or purpose of the fighting than Agu does. The aftermath of these events has the dark shock of a fairy tale; wandering in the forest, our hero is trapped and taken up by military rebels clad in ragtag uniforms and led by the Commandant (Idris Elba). Agu is trained not merely to serve but to kill, at which point the movie enters the territory of the almost unwatchable. We march through pillage and rape, and the Commandant

tightens his power through abuse of his youthful charges; meanwhile, the film itself, supped full of horrors, begins to sicken and dwindle. Time and again, Fukunaga's style relies on a flourish of gruesome intensity, although some viewers may feel that the events on show—such as Agu performing his first murder—are so dire that they beg to be filmed with a steadier eye.—*Anthony Lane* (In limited release.)

### The Big Lebowski

Joel and Ethan Coen tuned into the martial mood—and into political and personal history—for this ruefully astonished sendup of the American way of war, from 1998. It opens with the Dude (Jeff Bridges), an iconic philosophical slacker-stoner in Los Angeles, receiving an enhanced interrogation by a pair of thugs. Egged on to seek justice by Walter Sobchak (John Goodman)—his overwrought, over-armed bowling buddy, a survivor of martial and marital conflict and the most unorthodox of Orthodox Jews—he gets drawn into an internecine struggle that's none of his business. The physical and mental wounds that the Coens' characters bear from the Korean and Vietnam Wars are in the foreground, and the Dude himself—in an exalted scene featuring Julianne Moore—tells a surprising, "Zelig"-like tale of sixties radicalism gone to seed. It casts the Dude's dubious battle in the lurid light of new military temptations.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; Oct. 16-17.)

### Black Mass

Bowing to the principle that there can never be enough films about criminal fraternities, Scott Cooper's new movie takes us to Boston in the nineteen-seventies, where James Bulger (Johnny Depp), known as Whitey, runs the Winter Hill Gang. He holds sway for almost twenty years, and in that time he grows dangerously close to the F.B.I., for whom he becomes (though he would never use the word) a rat. In return, the agency—in particular an agent named John Connolly (Joel Edgerton), who hails from the same neighborhood—gives him all the leeway that he needs. The movie is a demonstration of power, with brawny roles for Jesse Plemons and Rory Cochrane, as Whitey's sidekicks, and a sly turn from Benedict Cumberbatch, as his brother, a state senator, no less. But much of the drama seems to occur

in a vacuum, with nobody filling the rooms and the streets except gangsters and lawmen, as if their pacts and standoffs were an elaborate game; the result is rarely as frightening as it hopes to be. Depp, tricked out with blue eyes and straw-pale hair, throws everything at the leading role, but are we watching a warped force of nature, as was certainly the case with the real Bulger, or an acting master class? With Julianne Nicholson and Dakota Johnson.—*A.L.* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/28/15.) (In wide release.)

### Elizabeth and Mary

In 1965, just before filming Bob Dylan in "Don't Look Back," the director D. A. Pennebaker made this documentary about identical twins in a New York family. Strangely, this movie, too, pivots on music. Elizabeth is blind, Mary sighted; Elizabeth suffers from mental illness (she attends a school for "disturbed" children), Mary does well in a mainstream all-girls Catholic school. The action covers a night and a day in the girls' lives. Pennebaker, working with the co-cameraman Nicholas Proferes, avoids interviews but continuously asserts his personal engagement and his point of view by way of composition and editing. Elizabeth is often in motion and filled with melody; she can carry a tune, and she sings a repertoire of pop songs. The studious and orderly Mary is like the Apollonian side of the family beside the Dionysian Elizabeth, with her whimsical and dramatic moods. A scene in Elizabeth's classroom presents a young boy approaching the piano and playing jazz with a rare creative verve. (What became of this prodigy?) In Pennebaker's probingly compassionate view, Elizabeth appears possessed of a similar, if inchoate, inspiration—without romanticizing her infirmities, he unfolds their seemingly impenetrable ecstasies.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Oct. 19.)

### Everest

Since his debut film, the spirited and lusty "101 Reykjavík" (2000), the Icelandic director Baltasar Kormákur has come a long way. Specifically, he has gone upward—into higher budgets and grander themes, and now to the roof of the world. Most of his new movie takes place on and around the mountain of the title, where two groups of climbers, one led by Rob Hall (Jason Clarke) and the other by



Scott Fischer (Jake Gyllenhaal), join forces in an attempt on the summit. Against them is a gathering storm, a shrinking window of time, and the fact that most of the mountaineers are paying customers who will settle for nothing less than a view from the top. Vertiginous viewers may want to close their eyes as the heights and depths, rendered yet more pitiless by 3-D, begin to stretch and yawn. The cast, which includes John Hawkes, Josh Brolin, Emily Watson, Keira Knightley, Sam Worthington, and Robin Wright, could hardly be stronger, yet that very strength compounds the feeling that, however implacable the icy blasts of the film, and however stirring its account of human endurance, we are never quite sure where the heart of the story lies.—*A.L.* (9/28/15) (In wide release.)

### Field Niggas

With vast empathy and spontaneous imagination, the director Khalik Allah revitalizes the genre of the observational documentary and transforms several simple technical tricks into a vision of the world. Filming in the summer of 2014 at and near the corner of 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, videotaping and interviewing people who hang out there—most of them black, many drug addicted,

some homeless, some discussing their prison time—Allah, doing his own handheld cinematography, presents his subjects in a dreamlike slow motion that turns video into a fluid transfiguration of painted portraiture. He also desynchronizes the soundtrack, matching interviews and discussions only approximately to the images. Allah engages the movie's participants in tough and insightful discussions about the police (who are seen onscreen, too), violence, substance abuse, and the inescapable impact of racism. For all its diagnostic insight of political ruin, the film evokes inner complexities that defy harsh circumstances with a virtually literary exaltation. The result is an intimate movie with a metaphysical grandeur, a detailed local inquiry that displays the crushing power of societal forces as well as the passion and vitality of those who endure.—*R.B.* (Made in NY Media Center by IFP.)

### The Intern

This earnest, effusive haut-bourgeois fantasy, by the writer and director Nancy Meyers, runs roughshod over rational skepticism with the force of her life experience. It's set in the overlap of two generations of Brooklyn businesspeople. Jules (Anne Hathaway) has built an Internet start-up from zero

to booming in eighteen months, but the pace of her passionately hands-on management style is straining her marriage to Matt (Anders Holm), a stay-at-home dad. Into Jules's stylishly renovated Red Hook offices skips a fairy godfather named Ben (Robert De Niro), a retired executive and lonely widower who arrives as one of the company's "senior interns." Jules, under pressure from investors to yield control of the company, increasingly relies on the wise, discreet, and admiring volunteer, who becomes a key presence in her business and her household alike. For all the nostalgic riffs about styles and virtues forged before the Age of Aquarius, the movie's real subject is the sentimental union of seeming enemies, the disruptive young entrepreneur and the old-school company man. Meyers, an insider's insider, dispenses her vision of feminism—and of independence—via the man in the gray flannel suit.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### Lydia Hoffman Lydia Hoffman

With wild yet precise performances poised between comedy and melodrama, this short film by Dustin Guy Defa packs the emotional scope of a feature film into its fifteen minutes. On a New York street, the young title character (Hannah Gross) flings

rage at her ex, Bruce (Josh Safdie), who flings it back, and stalks off. Diana (Dakota Goldhor), who witnesses the fight from a café window, comforts Lydia and accompanies her home with promises of solace and revelry. When two men join them, riffs on the New York Jewish psyche press close to old-school prejudice, and free-spirited spontaneity veers toward madness. Gross laces feverish pain with menace, and Goldhor's smoldering performance has a controlled ferocity—she turns "drunk" into three syllables and "cigarette" into a soliloquy, blending derisive artifice and agonized candor in a style akin to that of the young Gena Rowlands. Defa nudges his actors into the discomfort zone and, with the help of Sean Price Williams's cinematography, parses the day's simple but riotous fumbblings into potent memories.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Oct. 14-20.)

### The Marriage Circle

For his second American film, from 1923, Ernst Lubitsch turned a drawing-room farce into bittersweet chamber music—which, aptly, plays out in Vienna. The story begins with Professor Josef Stock (Adolphe Menjou) watching his wife, Mizzi (Marie Prevost), storm out of their

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elegant apartment; he then hires a detective in the hope of finding ground for divorce. She takes an interest in Dr. Franz Braun (Monte Blue), the husband of her best friend, Charlotte (Florence Vidor), who is, in turn, pursued by Braun's medical partner (Creighton Hale), a psychiatrist. Lubitsch's pointed visual double-entendres bear the shivery eroticism of Freudian suggestions. His appearance-obsessed characters hide their emotional turmoil behind ingratiating masks, but his greatest visual trope is the evocation—by means of silent images—of a world of sound. The suggestion of a ringing telephone, a tap on a windowpane, a voice in the dark, and a woman weeping behind closed doors may startle the viewer even as they spur characters to motion or freeze them with apprehension. Only a few notes separate these blithe romantic machinations from film noir. Silent.—R.B. (MOMA; Oct. 15.)

### The Martian

How on Earth do we land humans on Mars? Even as NASA struggles with this vast conundrum, Ridley Scott has jumped ahead and asked a different question, more rich in human error: How the hell could you leave a guy behind there? That is what happens here to Mark Watney (Matt Damon), an astronaut on a Martian mission. He is abandoned, presumed dead, when the rest of his crew, menaced by a wild storm, has to skedaddle and head back home. Declining to despair, Watney, a botanist by trade, sets about growing food and sitting out his years of solitude. Scott's movie, boosted by a chipper performance from Damon, feels anything but cramped; it revels not just in the finicky joys of ingenuity, as "Apollo 13" did, but, against the odds, in a kind of comic expansiveness. The script, by Drew Goddard, is adapted from the book of the same name by Andy Weir, and there is fine support from two quarters: first, from Jeff Daniels, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Kristen Wiig, as some of the surprised and worried honchos back at NASA; and, second, from Jessica Chastain as the captain of the mission, who has to decide whether to swing round to the red planet and pick up her lost friend.—A.L. (10/12/15) (In wide release.)

### Police

In Maurice Pialat's astringent drama, from 1985, Gérard Depardieu, playing the Parisian detective Louis Mangin, careens through the station house and the city at large as his swagger, bullshit meter, and sense of entitlement meet his venomous effusions of racism, sexism, brutality, and indifference to the law. The plot is launched by the arrest of a drug dealer (Jonathan Leïna) and his girlfriend, Noria (Sophie Marceau), who works with him (and sometimes against him). After taking up with the dealer's fast-talking lawyer (Richard Anconina)—Mangin's best friend—Noria throws herself at the detective, who loses his head and his bearings. Working with a story by Catherine Breillat, Pialat brings to life a high-relief throng of characters, including a coldly brilliant crime boss, an old turnkey whose heart is still in wartime Vietnam, and an upscale prostitute (Sandrine Bonnaire). Instead of movie music, Pialat adorns the soundtrack with a heavy-metal symphony: a revolver's spinning barrel, the clang of a cell door, the dead snap of locks, the jingle of keys, and the dull thud of a desk top when struck by a suspect's forehead. In French and Arabic.—R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 18.)

### Sicario

A young F.B.I. agent, Kate Macer (Emily Blunt), based at the frontier between America and Mexico, joins a new outfit that's devoted to nailing the

men who run the drug cartels. The team, which includes the cheerful Matt (Josh Brolin, in flip-flops) and the more mournful Alejandro (Benicio Del Toro), appears to have free rein—much to the dismay of Kate, who cleaves to the rule of law. Many blundering and noisy thrillers have been forged from such a setup, but the director here is Denis Villeneuve, and so the mood, even during exchanges of gunfire, is never less than ominous and fraught. Whether it suits Blunt, with her natural play of wit, is open to question, whereas Del Toro, allowing us only glimpses of his character's compulsions, thrives amid the gloom. The set pieces are carefully parcelled out: a shootout in a traffic jam, a dark descent into a border tunnel, and the discovery, inside an ordinary house, of corpses filling the walls. Anybody hoping for good news from the front line of the drug wars should look elsewhere. The director of photography is Roger Deakins: a recommendation in itself.—A.L. (9/21/15) (In wide release.)

### Taxi

In Jafar Panahi's new film, he plays himself: a movie director with a lousy sense of direction. We find him driving a cab cheerfully, but quite badly, around the streets of Tehran; given that, not long ago, he was arrested and charged with making propaganda against the regime, this feels like a minor act of liberation. His passengers (presumably played by actors, although they show up in a rough and random way) include a lawyer, a mugger, a dealer in contraband DVDs, and a couple of old ladies with a goldfish bowl. Sometimes they share a ride, which adds to the fun. There is also a young schoolgirl, voluble yet grave, who has to shoot her own short movie for a class project, thus compounding the sense that there is filming of every kind—on phones, on security cameras—going on all the time. Panahi's plight has been the subject of outraged protest in the West, and rightly so, yet you would hardly guess as much from the tenor of this work—tolerant, unspiteful, and graced with touches of near-farce. The effect is to put us in league with his fellow-Iranians: an irony that is lost, one imagines, on the authorities who seek to suppress him. In Farsi.—A.L. (10/12/15) (In limited release.)

### The Walk

Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire jaunt between the Twin Towers took meticulous and intrepid planning, as Petit himself recounts in the documentary "Man on Wire." In this new bio-pic, the director Robert Zemeckis dramatizes Petit's exploit; the caper-like plot that led up to the acrobatic feat is the center of the film, both chronologically and dramatically. The movie opens, however, with a blandly familiar tone, as the young Petit discovers his calling and perfects his craft under the stern but loving tutelage of the circus veteran Papa Rudy (Ben Kingsley). In scenes of a saccharine goofiness, the grown Petit (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) goes to Paris and meets Annie (Charlotte Le Bon), another street performer, who then accompanies him to New York when he heads there to realize his bold dream. As Petit assembles his team of "accomplices" and works out the daring details of his plot, the movie—despite touches of cornball comedy—comes alive, leading to the magic moment when Petit steps into the void. Here, Zemeckis hits his limit. The movie's overarching theme is Petit's self-asserted artistic ambitions and his quest for beauty, but Zemeckis's 3-D jumble of angles and swoops reduces the great walk to a mere stunt.—R.B. (In wide release.)

## NIGHT LIFE

### ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### "The AdHoc Car Wash"

The C.M.J. Music Marathon, no matter how good the participating bands, isn't an ideal festival for live music; groups are hurried from club to club without sound checks, playing rushed sets for industry hacks glued to their iPhones. Luckily, the local music blog AdHoc is hosting this unofficial daytime party at a car wash situated under the B.Q.E. The headliner is **Destruction Unit**, an Arizona punk band with a penchant for dark psychedelia. The group is joined by several of the rock acts worth seeing at C.M.J. this year, including **Perfect Pussy**, **Porches**, **Potty Mouth**, **Sheer Mag**, and **Protomartyr**. (Williamsburg Hand Car Wash & Detail Center, 646 Lorimer St., Brooklyn. Oct. 17.)

### Battles

This trio's continued success is one of the great riddles of contemporary rock. How could a nerdy group of experimental, math-rock and free-jazz elders produce songs marketable enough to end up in Audi commercials, video games, and the "Twilight" soundtrack? The answer is as elusive as the music, which is anything but accessible—the group's latest effort, "La Di Da Di," slithers and slides through a Technicolor collection of mostly instrumental glitchy grooves and dizzying, neo-tribal jam music. But, as is the case with the best pop bands, Battles resists interpretation, and encourages the sort of mutant dance party that you won't find anywhere else in town this week. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. Oct. 20.)

### Collect Records Showcase

When the young hedge-fund manager Martin Shkreli was crucified on social media, last month, for raising the price of an H.I.V. and cancer drug from \$13.50 to seven hundred and fifty dollars a pill, it was revealed that he was also an early investor in the boutique indie-punk label Collect Records. Many groups threatened to drop off, and Collect severed all ties with the shamed investor. This week, the label holds a showcase at the South Williamsburg haunt Baby's All Right, featuring a handful of bands who were vocally critical of Shkreli, including the female-fronted goth-punk act **Wax Idols** and **No Devotion**, which is led by Geoff Rickley, the label's founder. (146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Oct. 14.)

### The Men

Since its formation, in 2008, this well-loved New York City rock band has weathered a handful of lineup changes that have rendered it nearly unrecognizable from record to record. The group began on the uglier fringes of eighties indie rock (think Big Black, early Meat Puppets, Butthole Surfers), dominated by the confrontational bassist Christopher Hansell's maniacal shouting voice. He was replaced by the local musician and producer



Ben Greenberg, who helped the group release a few records of stoned-out classic rock. Greenberg has since left and the band has been pretty quiet, but it's coming out of hiding for a C.M.J. showcase, joined by the psych-punk band **Destruction Unit** (See "The AdHoc Car Wash"). (Baby's All Right, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. Oct. 16.)

#### **Dionne Warwick**

The legendary singer got her start in family groups—the Drinkard Singers, the Gospelaies, the Sweet Inspirations—in and around her native East Orange, New Jersey. She was singing backup at a session for the Drifters' "Mexican Divorce," in 1962, when the song's composer, Burt Bacharach, approached her, marking the start of one of the most fruitful pop collaborations of all time. Bacharach and the lyricist Hal David composed a glorious series of varied and unusual little masterpieces tailored to Warwick's smooth, slightly smoky delivery: "Walk on By," "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?," "I Say a Little Prayer," "Alfie," and "Promises, Promises," to name a few. She simply won't have time to sing all her hits. (B. B. King Blues Club, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Oct. 17.)

#### **JAZZ AND STANDARDS**

##### **BRIC JazzFest Marathon**

Brooklyn hosts its own first-rank jazz festival, which has been a long time coming. This two-night jam-packed event features performances from, among others, **Kamasi Washington, Ben Williams, Nir Felder, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Allison Miller, James Carter, and Nicholas Payton.** (BRIC House, 647 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-683-5600. Oct. 15-16.)

##### **Alan Broadbent and Putter Smith**

The elegant mainstream pianist Broadbent was a trusted associate of the late bassist and bandleader Charlie Haden; Smith, another close friend of Haden's, was the bassist in Broadbent's lyrical trios of the eighties and nineties. (Dig up the overlooked 1997 album "Personal Standards.") An intimate duet setting is sure to generate plenty of melodic radiance. (Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Oct. 16-17.)

##### **Kurt Elling**

One might wonder what Frank Sinatra would have thought of his fellow-vocalist Kurt Elling's musical adaptations of poems by the likes of Theodore Roethke and Rumi. But there's no doubt that Elling has the requisite chops to pull off an artful and heartfelt tribute to Sinatra, who would have been a hundred this year. (Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Oct. 13-17.)

##### **Tom Harrell Quintet**

Concluding his two-week engagement, the trumpeter Harrell turns the spotlight on his trusted quintet. With Wayne Escoffery, the saxophonist and eight-year veteran of the band, sharing the front line, Harrell's seasoned outfit has become a model of tight-knit, post-bop efficiency and invention. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Oct. 13-18.)

##### **John Scofield-Joe Lovano Quartet**

Reviving one of the great partnerships of the early nineties, the guitarist Scofield reunites with the saxophonist Lovano. As heard on the new album "Past Present"—where these two leading stylists are joined by their early bandmate the drummer Bill Stewart, and by the bassist Larry Grenadier—Scofield and Lovano prove that time can't diminish the most durable musical bonds. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Oct. 13-17.)

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—*The Washington Post*

**"Sublime"**

—*Vanity Fair*

**"Achingly beautiful"**

—*The New York Times*

**"These are the truths of art, genius, fate"**

—*New Yorker.com*

**"Full of grace"**

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Photograph © Claire Alexander Hatfield

{ The new book by the author of *Just Kids* }

# CLASSICAL MUSIC



The SONiC festival, presented by the American Composers Orchestra, begins on Oct. 15, with a concert by the Music from Copland House ensemble.

## SONIC YOUTH

*A festival of composers under forty defies categorization.*

**TO ATTEMPT BROAD STATEMENTS** about what the youngest generations of composers are thinking is to risk producing something like one of those cringe-inducing Sunday think pieces about Millennials, Facebook, “Girls,” and selfie sticks. More than eighty composers under the age of forty are featured in the SONiC festival, which will overrun venues across Manhattan and Brooklyn from Oct. 15 to Oct. 23. Is this cohort open to diverse influences, attuned to technology, inclined toward multimedia configurations, and fond of hybridized genres? So suggests the scholar and critic William Robin, in an essay heralding the festival. But he is wary of excessively sweeping claims, as are the composers whom he interviews. “Once you start generalizing,” Hannah Lash says, “the noise in your head becomes greater than the noise of the music, and you stop listening, you just start categorizing.”

Indeed, SONiC—which is curated by Derek Bermel and Anna Clyne, under the aegis of the American Composers Orchestra—seems almost designed to defy categorization. On Oct. 16, the A.C.O. presents four works under the rubric “New York Stories,” but no two stories speak the same language. Angélica Negrón, who shows the influence of the American gamelan master Lou Harrison, has written a piece incorporating eight robotic devices playing percussion. Andy Akiho, in “Tarnished Mirrors,” integrates an impression of steel-pan playing into a nimble, playful contemporary idiom. Judd Greenstein, whose music carries echoes of both minimalism and the American leftist-populist tradition, offers “My City,” a forty-minute setting of words by Walt Whitman, the bard of Brooklyn. And Alex Mincek, a young modernist whose work can suggest disintegrating dance music, is represented by “Continuo,” for string quartet and orchestra, which, while not explicitly New York-inspired, hints at urban dialogue and conflict.

The palette of sounds at SONiC ranges from Renaissance viols to theremins, bicycle sounds, and an iPhone pitch-bending app called the iLophone. Any New York-centric thinking will be challenged by the Dutch ensemble Nieuw Amsterdams Peil, the Mexican group Onix Ensemble, and the Los Angeles collective wild Up—whose favored composers tend to sway between sweet and harsh timbres, with improvisation bridging the gap. On Oct. 18, the JACK Quartet, having

performed Mincek’s piece, will host a six-hour marathon, which is likely to deliver a few transitional jolts. The lineup includes Amadeus Regucera’s “if only after you then me,” for voice and violin, whose text is compiled from writings by William S. Burroughs, Jean Genet, Georges Bataille, and Antonin Artaud, with instrumental savagery to match.

The danger in this kind of diverse programming is that it can present listeners with an indigestible smorgasbord of possibilities. Mincek, for one, avoids what he calls “self-aware pluralism”; he wants to savor the collision of multiple sound worlds while preserving an underlying coherence. But every composer pursues that sense of unity in diversity, continuity amid flux. Many generations ago, Beethoven sought the same.

—Alex Ross



## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

This week brings the final opportunities to catch the house's new production of Verdi's *"Otello"* before it returns next spring. Bartlett Sher's abstract staging, set in a generalized nineteenth-century locale, gains strength as the blood of Shakespeare's jealous Moor begins to boil—as does the singing of Aleksandrs Antonenko, in the punishing title role. The performances of Sonya Yoncheva, who brings a gently burnished voice and rare dramatic insight to the role of Desdemona, and Željko Lučić, a subtly menacing Iago, are a constant source of pleasure; Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts with the energy and exactitude that have made him an audience favorite. (Oct. 14 at 7:30 and Oct. 17 at 1.) • With its seamless transitions, voluptuous, boundary-pushing approach to harmonies, and grand vocal writing, *"Tannhäuser"* is a portrait of Wagner the composer entering mid-career. The score's superhuman demands should be secure in the hands of the Met's topnotch cast, including Johan Botha, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Michelle DeYoung, and the always excellent Peter Mattei, who, as Wolfram, delivers one of the opera's loveliest moments, the "Hymn to the Evening Star"; James Levine—having withdrawn from the new production of *"Lulu"*—is slated to conduct. (Oct. 15 and Oct. 19 at 7.) • Luc Bondy's 2009 production of *"Tosca"*, which plays up the sleazier aspects of Puccini's melodrama about sexual blackmail, may have flopped on opening night, but it's proved easy to revive: the set's modern, open spaces make it a blank canvas for compelling singing actors to enliven the composer's proto-cinematic thriller. Plácido Domingo steps up to the conductor's podium, leading a cast that includes Oksana Dyka, Roberto Aronica, and Roberto Frontali. (Oct. 16 at 7:30.) • The plot of *"Il Trovatore"* is notoriously far-fetched—fiery Gypsy curses, babies switched at birth—but it inspired four of Verdi's most explosive characters. Anna Netrebko, in opulent voice as Leonora, and Dolores Zajick, who blazes through Azucena's music with scorched-earth intensity, lead the current revival of David McVicar's straightforward production. Also with Antonello Palombi (replacing Yonghoon Lee) in the strenuous tenor role of Manrico and Vitaliy Bilyy as the Count di Luna; Marco Armiliato. (Oct. 17 at 8.) • Michael Mayer's flashy staging of *"Rigoletto"*, set in a nineteen-sixties Las Vegas casino, turns Verdi's drama about badly behaved courtiers into a carnival of American excess. Stephen Costello stars as the profligate Duke, a Rat Pack-era Sinatra type in a white dinner jacket, along with the steadfast George Gagnidze as Rigoletto and the sparkling Olga Peretyatko as Gilda; Pablo Heras-Casado. (Oct. 20 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

### "The Travel Agency Is on Fire: Burroughs Cuts Up the Great Bards"

The ectoplasmic, consciousness-flipping prose of William S. Burroughs has inspired a bevy of filmmakers, painters, and songwriters. But, this week, the composer-led collective Experiments in Opera brings to the Stone eleven new concert pieces

based on texts taken from a recently published anthology of Burroughs's "cut-up" works, a process that involved slicing and dicing pages of text (by such writers as Joyce, Burgess, and Shakespeare) and rearranging them to remove narrative. Featured are compositions by Lukas Ligeti, Elliott Sharp, Anne Guthrie, and JG Thirlwell, among others, with performances by James Ilgenfritz's Anagram Ensemble and a crew of vocalists that includes Megan Schubert and Nick Hallett. (Ave. C at 2nd St. Oct. 16 at 8 and 10. Tickets at the door.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic

The orchestra, returning from a Midwest tour, offers a pair of unique programs this week. One is an evening with Maurizio Pollini, the keyboard megastar, who last performed with the orchestra in 1994. The Philharmonic's current music director, Alan Gilbert, collaborates with Pollini in Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor; the concert begins with urgent, ur-Romantic repertoire by Berlioz (the "Le Corsaire" Overture) and Tchaikovsky ("Romeo and Juliet"). (Oct. 16 at 8.) • Eric Owens, the captivating bass-baritone, doesn't sing at the Met until next spring, but he has an extended gig with the Philharmonic this season, as its artist-in-residence. One of his projects is "In Their Footsteps," a tribute to the passel of great African-American singers who blazed a trail through twentieth-century performance. On the program is music—by Joplin, Mahler, Gershwin, Verdi, and Copland—intimately connected to the artistry of Marian Anderson, William Warfield, Betty Allen, and George Shirley. Performing it are the singers Janai Brugger, Laquita Mitchell, Marietta Simpson, Russell Thomas, and Owens, assisted by the Dorothy Maynor Singers of the Harlem School for the Arts. Thomas Wilkins conducts, in his Philharmonic debut. (Oct. 14-15 at 7:30.) (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)

### Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

The renowned conductorless chamber orchestra offers music not only by two of the Romantic movement's core composers, Mendelssohn (the "Midsummer Night's Dream" Overture) and Schumann (the infectiously lyrical Symphony No. 2 in C Major), but also by its leading present-day follower, Wolfgang Rihm, whose brand-new "Duo Concerto" (featuring the violinist Mira Wang and her husband, the cellist Jan Vogler), at the center of the program, is a nod to the Baroque era. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 15 at 8.)

### American Symphony Orchestra: "Seeing Is Believing"

A new version of Nico Muhly's dazzling concerto for electric violin (played by Tracey Silverman, the instrument's current master) and orchestra, described by the composer as a musicalization of "the superstitious practice of mapping the sky," is the centerpiece of Leon Botstein's latest program. Officially titled "Mimesis: Musical Representations," it traces the arc of one art form imitating another

## OF NOTE WHITE LIGHT FESTIVAL

We are in a Schubert moment: the Master's sublime song cycles are frequently performed in New York, and major artists yearn to put their mark on them. The Lincoln Center autumn concert series, with its spiritual focus, brings this trend to its apogee, presenting the searching British tenor Mark Padmore, who will perform them, in German, on three successive evenings, using their English-language titles: "The Lovely Mill-Maiden," "Swan Song" (the least well known of the three), and "Winter Journey." Replacing the indisposed pianist Paul Lewis will be the forté pianist Kristian Bezuidenhout, whose background in period performance will give the recitals an unexpected new angle. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 14-15 and Oct. 17 at 7:30.)

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also through canonical works by Gunther Schuller ("Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee") and Richard Strauss ("Also Sprach Zarathustra," inspired by Nietzsche's philosophical novel), and includes another recent work, the late Henri Dutilleux's "Correspondances" (with the soprano Sophia Burgos). (Carnegie Hall, 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 at 8.)

#### 92nd Street Y Opening Night

The legacy of George Gershwin is not a simple one—his lightning brilliance as both pianist and songwriter being largely intuitive, he often turned to arrangers and orchestrators to see his concert music to completion. Opening the season at the Upper East Side venue is an evening that features two of the composer's most cherished "classical" pieces—"Rhapsody in Blue" and the "Concerto in F"—in Ferde Grofé's jazz-band versions. They will be performed by the pianist Kirill Gerstein, no stranger to jazz, accompanied by Vince Giordano & the Nighthawks, with the renowned conductor Maurice Peress at the podium. For those not fortunate enough to have a ticket, the

long-sold-out event will be streamed for twenty-four hours afterward at 92YonDemand.org. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

#### RECITALS

##### Maya Beiser: "All Vows"

The powerhouse cellist joins the bassist Jherek Bischoff and the drummer Zachary Alford at BAM for a set of genre-defying concerts. The program's title is the English translation of "Kol Nidre"; it features arrangements of songs by classic-rock titans such as Janis Joplin and Led Zeppelin, as well as more overtly spiritual fare, including Michael Gordon's "All Vows" and Michael Harrison's mesmeric "Just Ancient Loops." (BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. bam.org. Oct. 14-17 at 7:30.)

##### Benjamin Grosvenor

The formidable young British pianist, already an artist of Glenn Gouldian self-possession, comes to Carnegie's Zankel Hall to offer his highly individual readings of Baroque-inspired repertory by Mendelssohn, Bach (the

Chaconne, in the Busoni arrangement), Franck, and Ravel ("Le Tombeau de Couperin"), along with Liszt's sun-splashed "Venezia e Napoli." (212-247-7800. Oct. 15 at 7:30.)

#### New York Early Music

##### Celebration: "Music Before 1800" Series

The Early Music Foundation's fifth annual festival, which this year concentrates on Latin-American and Iberian music, is presenting concerts all over Manhattan this month—including one put on by this organization, which has been sponsoring first-class programs for more than four decades. Next up is the U.S. debut of Música Temprana, a group of Latin-American musicians based in the Netherlands, who will offer a selection of popular songs and dances from Colonial-era Peru. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 18 at 4. For a full schedule of festival concerts, see nyemc.org.)

##### "Tokyo to New York"

The admired pianists Taka Kigawa and Judith Olson, in addition to the

traditional Japanese musicians Jun Ando and Chatori Shimizu, join Thomas Piercy—equally adept at clarinet and *hichiriki*—in a concert that brings together works by composers from New York and Japan, including David Del Tredici, William Mayer, Ned Rorem ("Four Colors"), Jun Nagao, and Ippo Tsuboi ("Sky View Factor II"). (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43 W. 13th St. 212-645-2800. Oct. 18 at 4.)

#### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The standard-bearer for chamber music in Gotham offers its season-opening program, featuring such veterans as the pianist Wu Han and the violinist Ani Kavafian, and members of the young-artist program CMS Two. The repertoire, a survey of Classical and Romantic styles, begins with Haydn's Piano Trio No. 32 in A Major and closes with Schumann's rousing Piano Quintet—with Mendelssohn's delightful (and very early) Piano Sextet in D Major as a bridge between the two. (Alice Tully Hall. lincolncenter.org. Oct. 18 at 5 and Oct. 20 at 7:30.)



#### New York City Ballet

In the final week of the season, the company alternates between a program of new works and a double bill of high-spirited dances from years past. Among the latter is Balanchine's lighthearted "Harlequinade," created, in 1965, to feature the talents of the company's most charming couple at the time: Edward Villella and Patricia McBride. The love story, based on a 1900 ballet by Petipa, is populated by commedia-dell'arte stock characters: Harlequin, Columbine, Pierrot, Pierrette. In the second act, they are joined in a lively divertissement by dozens of young dancers from the company's school. • Oct. 13-15 at 7:30 and Oct. 17 at 2: "Harlequinade" and "N.Y. Export: Opus Jazz." • Oct. 16-17 at 8: "Common Ground," "The Blue of Distance," "Polaris," "New Blood," and "Jeux." • Oct. 18 at 3: "Concerto Barocco," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Episodes," and "The Four Temperaments." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500.)

#### Silas Riemer

At once daring and hyper articulate, Riemer was a standout dancer in the final Merce Cunningham troupe and has since become a standout dancer in works by Rashaun Mitchell, Kota Yamazaki, and Tere O'Connor. His own choreography, so far, has made less of his great gifts. His new work, "Blue Name," is a solo with an electronic score, by Jesse Stiles, that responds to Riemer's bold and subtle movements. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Oct. 14-17. Through Oct. 28.)

#### Martin Zimmermann / "Hallo"

Clowning, illusionism, and collapsing set pieces are all part of this show by the Swiss-born Jack-of-all-trades Martin Zimmermann. (He dances, builds the sets, and comes up with the concepts.) With his downtrodden everyman demeanor and remarkably disjointed physical presence, Zimmermann keeps the tricks and slapstick going at an impressive pace. What it all adds up to is anybody's guess.

(BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 15-17.)

#### Moriah Evans

Earlier this year, Evans, a smart choreographer whose ideas about dance can be puritanically conceptual, put the pleasures of social dancing in a straightjacket of minimalist choreography called "Social Dance 1-8: Index." It was fascinating and frustrating to witness. Now, in "Social Dance 9-12: Encounter," she turns her analytical

mind to the social dynamics of looking and being looked at. The presence of such dancers as Rashaun Mitchell, Irène Hultman, and Maggie Cloud in the cast pretty much guarantees that there will be something worth watching. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 15-17.)

#### H. T. Chen & Dancers

Many Chinese people who immigrated to California during the Gold Rush

#### OF NOTE JOSÉ LIMÓN INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL

For four decades, the Limón Dance Company has answered the question of how a modern-dance company should cope after the death of its founder: soldier on, through thick and thin. Now, on the eve of its seventieth anniversary, it hosts an ambitious two-week festival, featuring fourteen Limón works, many of which are rarely performed. The troupe is joined by dancers from a host of international companies and schools, including the Royal Danish Ballet (in "The Unsung") and the Instituto Sinaloense de Cultura (in excerpts from "A Choreographic Offering"). (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 13-18 and Oct. 20. Through Oct. 25.)



later moved to the American South, building railroads and opening groceries. Chen's new piece, "South of Gold Mountain," pays tribute to these Chinese-Americans below the Mason-Dixon line, drawing on oral history, interviews, historical photographs, traditional Chinese music, and Delta blues to tell their stories through dance. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 15-18.)

#### "Breakin' Convention"

After a decade of popular and critical success in London, this festival of hip-hop dance first came to New York in 2013, promising to honor the genre's birthplace while bringing news of developments abroad. This return engagement features a similarly two-sided lineup, split between representatives of the American scene (Rennie Harris Puremovement, from Philadelphia, and

Klassic and Havoc, from Brooklyn) and visitors from Europe (Les Twins, from France, and the Ruggeds, from Holland). Jonzi D, the festival's director, serves once again as a voluble m.c., co-hosting with the hip-hop legend Grandmaster Caz. (Apollo Theatre, 253 W. 125th St. 800-745-3000. Oct. 16-18.)

#### "Works & Process" / BalletCollective

Troy Schumacher, a member of New York City Ballet, runs his own outfit on the side, BalletCollective. Schumacher's latest two dances are inspired by the photographs of Paul Maffi and Dafy Hagai. At this session, the troupe will perform excerpts from these works, and Schumacher, Maffi, and the composers Ellis Ludwig-Leone and Mark Dancigers will offer a glimpse into their highly collaborative process. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Oct. 19.)

## ABOVE & BEYOND

#### Open House New York

This annual event opens the doors to hundreds of buildings throughout the city, many of which are usually closed to the public. In addition to sites featured on previous Open House weekends, such as the Grand Lodge of Masons and the TWA terminal at J.F.K. (which will soon be converted into a hotel), this year's edition adds various first-time locations, including the renovated City Hall, Google's Chelsea outfit, and the World's Fair Pavilion. In a special series, the engineers for innovative structures such as the High Line park and the glass cube above the Apple store on 59th Street lead tours of their projects. All events are free, but some require advance booking. (ohny.org. Oct. 17-18.)

#### AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

**Swann's** sale of photographs (Oct. 15) offers a little bit of everything: portraits (of Frida Kahlo and Colette, among others), documentary images (like Margaret Bourke-White's chilling shot of survivors staring bleakly through the fence at Buchenwald), sumptuous landscapes, and more. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) • It's a big week for home decorations at **Sotheby's**, which starts things off with a sale of silver objects and Russian artifacts (Oct. 14), including a silver table lamp by Fabergé and an irresistible pink-and-gold enamel-encrusted snuffbox fit for an afternoon of leisure at Versailles. This is followed by two full days (Oct. 15 and Oct. 17) devoted to ornate eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European furniture and bric-a-brac—including a large group of clocks—leading into a private collection of furnishings from an elegant Virginia estate (Oct. 19). The only respite from this surfeit of tasteful splendor is an auction, on Oct. 16, of celebrity portraits by Francesco Scavullo, the essential photographer of the nineteen-eighties, responsible for countless *Cosmo* covers. His subjects here include Mick Jagger (in lamé short-shorts), Mikhail Baryshnikov, and a happy-looking Luciano Pavarotti. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

#### READINGS AND TALKS

##### Albertine

"Mad Like Artaud," edited by Sylvère Lotringer, is a collection of pieces on the Surrealist writer and artist Antonin Artaud, and on the role that his mental illness played in his art. (He was institutionalized for many years.) The launch of the book's English-language edition will feature live performances of an interview that Lotringer conducted with one of Artaud's psychiatrists, and of Artaud's play "Jet of Blood." (972 Fifth Ave. albertine.com. Oct. 14 at 7.)

##### Brooklyn Historical Society

The Whitney Plantation, in Wallace, Louisiana—which was originally owned by a family of German immigrants, who named it Habitation Haydel—opened in 2014 as a museum that pays homage to the slaves of the American South. John Cummings, its founder, joins Jelani Cobb, a writer for this magazine, in a conversation about the museum, which is the first to focus on U.S. slavery. (128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn. Oct. 15 at 6.)

##### New York Public Library

In the latest installment in a series of talks about the relationship between poetry and other art forms, the poet Mark Doty, who is a chancellor of the American Academy of Poets and the author of several collections, including, most recently, "Deep Lane," appears in conversation with the choreographer Bill T. Jones, whose awards include a MacArthur grant and a Tony for his work on "Fela!" (455 Fifth Ave. nypl.org/events. Oct. 19 at 7.)

##### BookCourt

Sarah Vowell reads from her latest work of chatty American history, "Lafayette in the Somewhat United States." The book recounts the French general's idealistic attraction to the American colonies, the less ideal reality that he encountered on his arrival, and the story of how he became a national hero. (163 Court St., Brooklyn. bookcourt.com. Oct. 20 at 7.)

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## TABLES FOR TWO

# SEAMORE'S

390 Broome St. (212-730-6005)

IN THE LATE NINETIES, when marine conservationists first reported that swordfish was in danger of being overfished, many fishmongers and restaurants kept selling it, leaving conscientious omnivores to wonder, Who are these evil people still selling swordfish? The bad news kept coming: bycatch was killing off sea turtles; mercury-laden tuna was so dangerous it caused the sushi addict Jeremy Piven to take sick leave from his Broadway show "Speed-the-Plow"; tilapia, the miracle budget fish, was deemed in some ways worse for you than bacon. To top it off, a series of studies in the past five years found that seafood fraud was rampant, and that an estimated forty per cent of all fish sold in the U.S. is not what the label claims—leaving some people nostalgic for good old "fish" sticks. At least you knew what you were getting.

Seamore's, a beachy canteen at the edge of Little Italy, attempts to take the mystery out of fish, purporting to offer only the sustainable and the seasonal, while keeping prices reasonable. On a back wall of the light, airy room, awash in blond wood and seafoam accents, a black-and-white diagram illustrates eighteen local fish; paddles are hung next to the three lucky winners being served that day. Many of the fish are caught off of Montauk (and the Carolinas in winter), and the selection includes less popular varieties, like bluefish, porgy, and tilefish. Among the au-courant starters—guacamole with a touch of cumin, shishito peppers seared and salted, an unsuspectingly awesome kale salad, with a creamy, sweet-and-salty dressing and cubes of avocado and butternut squash—there's a lovely tuna poke, seasoned with scallions, sesame, and soy. Tacos are a great bet; one night, mackerel tacos were satisfying, if odd, but it was the fried dogfish that everyone wanted. Gorgeous batons were crisped in a fluffy beer batter and topped with chipotle mayo, avocado cream, and shavings of kale, purple cabbage, and radish.

The owner is Michael Chernow, of the Meatball Shop, a mini-chain where diners mix and match their meatball dinners, served with a generous side of booze and sophomoric "ball" jokes. Seamore's, thankfully, takes the high road, avoiding double entendre while retaining its predecessors' casual D.I.Y. spirit with "the reel deal": pick a fish, add a sauce and three sides. Order well, and you'll have a fish special that's spectacular in its simplicity. Recently, beautifully seared hake was served with luscious miso butter, farro with olives and sea beans, spinach with almonds, and caper-studded cauliflower. The restaurant's few missteps include a meagre, over-peppered tuna burger and no fries other than sweet potato. But that overreaching gesture toward trendy health-consciousness should be forgiven, because there are very few restaurants that call such attention to sustainable fish. A sea change takes a long time—why not start with dogfish tacos?

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées \$13-\$21.

—Shauna Lyon



# FOOD & DRINK

## BAR TAB GIN FIZZ

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Waitresses in cocktail dresses and spiked heels part a velvet curtain for guests climbing the stairs to this uptown speakeasy. "It's very sexy," a Russian blonde who owns a catsuit business commented the other night, pointing to the hushed room's gilded mirrors and tufted booths. "I feel like I'm in Moscow." She scanned the menu and settled on the Smokey Bandit, a tequila-and-mezcal cocktail with a spicy kick. At other tables, people sipped Ramos Gin Fizzes, heavy on the egg white and nutmeg, and puffed mint-scented smoke from hookah pipes. As the drinks arrived, a man wearing a red shirt with a wide collar spread over his jacket announced from the stage that the night's show was about to begin. Thursdays are the Harlem Sessions—"a bit of soul music, a bit of jazz, a bit of Jamaican"—presided over by the pianist Marc Cary. Home-town favorites, as well as a Serbian bassist and a Moldovan vocalist, cycled through the limelight, playing the kind of music that, as Langston Hughes wrote, "laughs and cries at the same time." Maybe because of all the international talent, maybe because the gin was flowing liberally, Cary felt the need to make an announcement: "It's Harlem, folks, and all the greatest people are in the building and yet to come." The Russian entrepreneur was convinced. "I want to live here," she announced.

—Nicolas Niarchos



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA KALFAS





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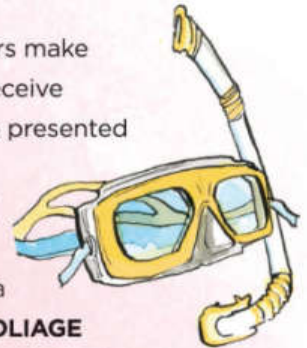


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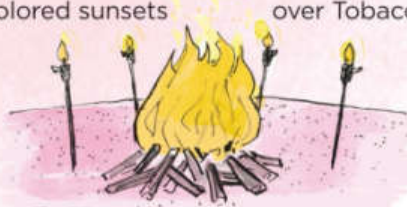


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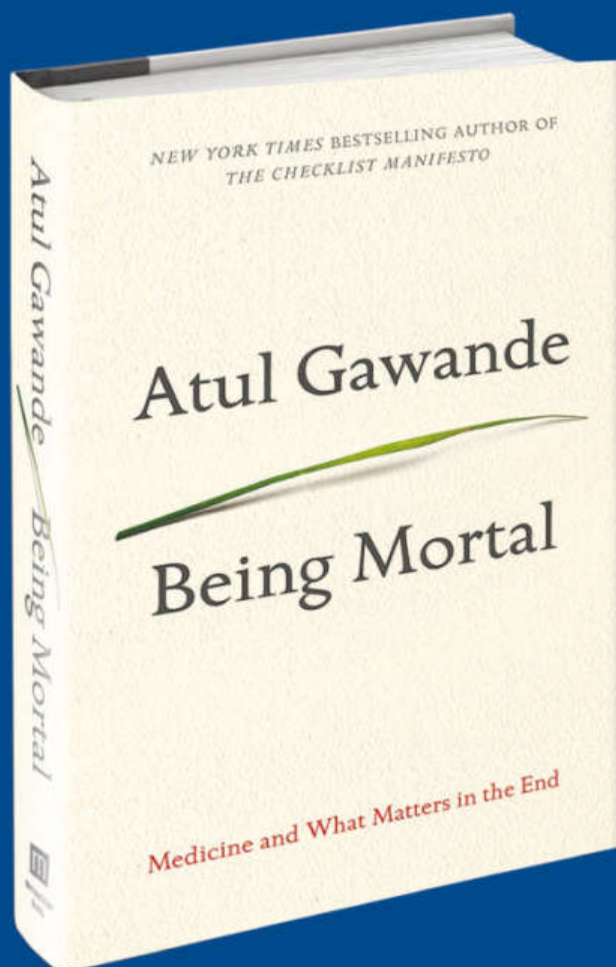
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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT OCTOBER SURPRISES

Last week was a good one for Hillary Clinton. It started with her appearance on “Saturday Night Live.” Kate McKinnon did her customary Clinton impression, this time sitting in a bar, trying to forget about Donald Trump. Clinton played Val the bartender, who seemed to embody how the former Secretary of State would like to be seen: as a hard-working, wryly funny older friend, whose earned wisdom you can turn to at the end of a long day. They sang “Lean On Me,” and, after Clinton left, McKinnon pronounced, “She was real and smart and really nice in person!”

Two days later, the “Today” show found Clinton flipping pancakes for voters in New Hampshire. When she was asked yet again about her e-mail accounts, she dismissed the question and cited the extraordinarily impolitic boast made a few days earlier by the House Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, who had told Fox’s Sean Hannity, “Everybody thought Hillary Clinton was unbeatable, right? But we put together a Benghazi special committee, a select committee. What are her numbers today?” The Republicans were embarrassed, and Clinton benefitted. Last Thursday, McCarthy was forced to drop out of the race to succeed John Boehner as Speaker of the House.

Clinton is still scheduled to testify before the Benghazi committee a week after the first Democratic Presidential debate, which will be sponsored by CNN and held on October 13th, in Las Vegas. The Benghazi hearings would seem to have little credibility left, but both events will mark a new stage of the campaign for Clinton, one in which she will have to relinquish the tight control she has maintained over her appearances. At the debate, she will be joined onstage by Bernie Sanders, who has launched a strong challenge and is now favored by twenty-five per cent of likely Democratic voters, to her forty-two per cent, and by Martin O’Malley, Lincoln Chaffee, and Jim Webb, all of whom are polling in the one-per-cent range. Vice-President Biden, because he is polling at around eight-

teen per cent, is eligible to take part, even if he declares at the last minute.

Biden’s role has been a big open question. Another is why this first debate is so late in coming. The Republicans have already had two, each of which attracted more than twenty million television viewers, and will stage ten more. The Democratic National Committee has authorized only six. One is the Saturday night before Christmas; another is the Sunday night before Martin Luther King, Jr., Day—not times likely to attract large audiences. Given the concerns about the Presidency being passed between a couple of families, why set up a schedule that seems designed to squelch lesser-known candidates’ chances?

The lesser-knowns have objected, but Clinton doesn’t seem to mind. One reason for that might be gleaned by looking back to October 30, 2007, when the Democrats debated in Philadelphia. Clinton was the front-runner then, too, and it was the *thirteenth* time the candidates had met. But it was also, arguably, the first time that her opponents—Dennis Kucinich, Bill Richardson, John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, Joe Biden, and, most improbably, Barack Obama—seriously

challenged her, on all fronts. Edwards accused her of “doubletalk.” Obama called her out for “changing positions whenever it’s politically convenient”—she was “for NAFTA previously, now she’s against it”—and for not being “truthful.” A lot of the time was taken up asking why records of her official work in her husband’s White House were sealed in the Clinton Presidential library. She responded with what must have been intended as judiciousness but came across as obfuscation. When Tim Russert, one of the moderators, tried to determine whether she was in favor of issuing driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants—she had indicated both yes and no—she called his question a “gotcha.”

In the days that followed, Clinton and



her campaign tried to frame the debate as a Hillary-against-the-world moment, a “pile-on,” orchestrated by what she called, in a speech at Wellesley College, “the all-boys’ club.” Clinton had been considered the winner in most of the previous debates, and even many of her supporters acknowledged that this one marked a turning point. A week before, she was at 48.5 per cent in an average of polls, the highest she had ever been. (Obama registered 21.2.) Immediately afterward, she began a decline and, despite some rebounds, never matched that number again.

From her perspective, there may have been something broken about the 2008 debates. A remarkable eighteen million people voted for her during the primary season, and she and her supporters may feel that a process that derailed her then is not one to follow now. But, if Clinton has concluded that the lesson of 2008 is to avoid debates, she does not yet understand why she lost that night in Philadelphia. Polls still show that a perception of dishonesty is her greatest problem among voters. (“They don’t trust you. They might not like you,” Savannah Guthrie told her last week.) Often, that perception is the product of unfair partisan attacks, but, as in 2008, it is also sometimes the result of her decisions. Last Wednesday, Clinton announced that she opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal that is a high

priority for President Obama, even though she had praised the negotiations when she was Secretary of State (“the gold standard in trade agreements”) and referred to them proudly after she left office.

The thinking appears to be that she’ll score points with Sanders voters and with organized labor, while Biden, as a loyal member of the Administration, will have to support the T.P.P.—a classic triangulation. But it echoes Obama’s NAFTA comment from the Philadelphia debate, just as the questions about her White House records now sound like a prelude to the e-mail issue. Fair or not, she needs to push herself to a greater level of openness, and figure out how to have a good week based on a real-world confrontation, not a comedy-sketch encounter. Clinton stayed in the 2008 race for eight months after her loss in Philadelphia. By the end, Barack Obama was a palpably stronger candidate. So, for that matter, was Hillary Clinton. A few weeks after Philadelphia, she had picked herself up and gone to the next debate, in Las Vegas—the site of this week’s meeting—where she performed well. The last question, from a young woman, was a “fun” one: “Do you prefer diamonds or pearls?” Clinton laughed. “Now, I know I’m sometimes accused of not being able to make a choice,” she said. Then she added, “I want both.”

—Amy Davidson

## THE SPORTING LIFE POST-DUGOUT



The day after the New York Mets’ final regular-season game—a 1–0 adios to the Washington Nationals that averted a six-game-losing-streak hangover en route to the playoffs—Keith Hernandez, the former All-Star–Gold Glove–M.V.P.–Mets captain first baseman and current First Amendment crusader in the SNY broadcasting booth (“What is he doing? What is he doing! What a rockhead!”... “That slide—you can put that slide in the toilet”), began a slightly bumpy transition to his other occupation, man of leisure. His alarm went off at 6 A.M., a shocking hour, so that a driver could deliver him to Kennedy Airport for a promotional event. Discovering upon arrival that he was a day early, he rebuked himself (“Idiot!”), then retreated to Sag Harbor, his seasonal abode. In the early afternoon, he showed up on time for a physical-therapy appointment in a windowed studio with a view of the bay. He wore Levi’s, a red T-shirt, and blue Nikes, and spent

an hour moving weights and lying on a massage table.

“Rotator-cuff repair,” he said—not an old baseball injury but a recent spectator-sport casualty. “Last Christmas, I was home watching a bowl game on TV, I picked up a couple of free weights for a little workout—too heavy, it turned out—and the next morning it let me know. I had shoulder surgery four months ago, was in a sling, and got out of shape. The season’s over now, so I can get back into it, get my legs stronger and my wind back up.”

When Hernandez was a player, his habits included smoking in the dugout runway between innings, but he wisened up a couple of years after retiring, in 1991. He weighed a hundred and eighty-five pounds when he got called up from the Tulsa Oilers to the St. Louis Cardinals, in 1974, a fat-free two-oh-three in his prime, and would now like to get down to two-fifteen, a manageable goal. This month, he turns sixty-two (same birthday: Mickey Mantle, Juan Marichal). He’s gray at the temples but not, when he’s being fastidious, above his upper lip, where he periodically applies a men’s hair-coloring product to his cash-crop mustache, a featured player in commercials pairing Hernandez with

Walt Frazier, the bearded doggerelist.

He got off the massage table and said, “Once I’m off the air, I’ll shave it off. I don’t like it anymore. I’ll keep it off until spring training. I do the next commercial next year. A two-year deal, etched in stone.”

After a quick errand, he drove home, to the well-hidden, amply furnished house he shares with his thirteen-year-old Bengal cat, Hadji. His only plan for the rest of the day was to soak in a hot tub while reading.

During the playoffs, Hernandez does pre- and postgame palaver for SNY. Thus the promise of postmortems like this, following a home-stretch loss to the Phillies: “Well, it is another morning-after game after that fiasco of a baseball game last night that set the game back into the Stone Ages. Almost four hours of Oh, my goodness.” Once the Mets collect either their World Series rings or their crying towels, he departs for Florida, his winter home, where his to-do list includes riding his bike, fishing, and more reading.

“I may read ‘Moby-Dick’ again,” he said. “I haven’t read it since my twenties. You’ve got a whole lot going on in ‘Moby-Dick’—Ishmael, Ahab, the Christ imagery.” A living-room



bookshelf was lined with Easton Press leather-bound classics.

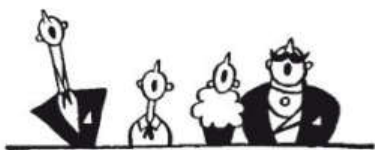
"I haven't read them all, but I've read a lot of them," he continued. "Tried to read Faulkner. I was very fortunate, my senior year in high school, to have the greatest English-lit teacher, Mr. Mahaffey. We read 'Beowulf'—that was a little tough—and 'Macbeth,' 'Canterbury Tales.' We all had to recite the entire 'To be or not to be' soliloquy in front of the class. Could I do it now? No. And Mr. Mahaffey turned me on to Steinbeck. The first Steinbeck I read was 'In Dubious Battle.' He actually lived in Sag Harbor. He wrote 'The Winter of Our Discontent' here. I've never read Hemingway. I've got writer friends—this town's full of writers—so they'll recommend which Hemingway I should read."

He opened a screen door to a backyard studded with oak trees and an elaborately executed English cottage garden.

"My little sanctuary back here," he said. "Throughout the spring to the end of summer, something's blooming. I love it. That's a rose that blooms beautifully in May. It only blooms once full. This is my herb garden here, and this is my main rose garden here. They thrive out here in this sandy soil. My lawn took a beating with the heat. Oh, wow—the voles made a home around the roses and that's a no-no. That's not happening. PETA can go . . . whatever. I'm sorry. The voles are gonna die."

—Mark Singer

## THE BOARDS ENLIGHTENED



When the composer Duncan Sheik was nineteen, he visited Los Angeles, hoping to land a meeting with a music publisher. He stayed with an older relative, a longtime member of the Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist lay organization headquartered in Japan. She and Sheik debated spiritual matters, until she told him, as he recalled the other day, "Unless you actually sit down and practice, it's not really going to have an effect on your life." So Sheik knelt before her Gohonzon—a Buddhist

scroll—and chanted. Then the music publisher called. "I thought, Oh, wow, Buddhism works!"

The deal never materialized, but Sheik kept chanting when he returned to Brown for his sophomore year, perplexing his roommates. For the past twenty-six years, he has chanted nearly every morning and night: through his fleeting career as a nineties pop dreamboat, thanks to the hit single "Barely Breathing," and through his resurgence as a Broadway composer, in 2006, with the indie-rock musical "Spring Awakening," based on the 1891 Frank Wedekind drama of teen-age sexual angst. (A revival, performed by a mixed cast of deaf and hearing actors, has just opened, at the Brooks Atkinson.) Sheik wrote "Spring Awakening" with a friend from the Soka Gakkai, Steven Sater, and it may be the only Broadway musical with deliberately Buddhist underpinnings. "In Buddhist epistemology," Sheik explained, "there's this idea, the ten life states that every human being shuttles between," among them hell, hunger, animality, realization, bodhisattva, and Buddhahood. "Spring Awakening," he said, hits all of them.

Sheik rode his bicycle to an apartment building in the Financial District. He was running late for a Soka Gakkai meeting, which he attends once a month. "We're rolling in like pros," he said in the lobby (he is a sarcastic Buddhist), and took the elevator to the fourth floor, where the hum of chanting was audible in the hallway. He slipped into an apartment belonging to Don Giampietro, who works for the city government. About forty people were crammed into the living room, most with prayer beads, chanting "*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*" ("I devote myself to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law") in unison. A Gohonzon was mounted on the wall, where one might otherwise find a flat-screen TV. Sheik tiptoed through the crowd and knelt on the carpet.

After about fifteen minutes, an organizer greeted everyone and said, "Next, we have an Experience by Ariana." A young woman on the couch, introducing herself as a writer and performer, read off her iPhone. "Since practicing in March, I've probably gone on, like, fifty auditions," she said. "As I made my way through the summer and a job I really

hated, I chanted. I'd come home from a shift totally exhausted, and I'd still chant to do my best the next morning at this restaurant. Sometimes I would just cry in front of the Gohonzon." In August, she got an interview to write for "Watch What Happens: Live." "And I waited and I chanted and I waited and I chanted." She didn't get the job. "I took a deep breath, and I silently told myself, 'Con-



Duncan Sheik

gratulations.' Because, as a Buddhist, that's what we say when we encounter an obstacle." The room applauded. "That is the best Experience I've ever heard in my entire life!" Sheik said, as a Power-Point presentation on the theme "Struggling with Illness Can Forge Invincible Spiritual Strength" was beginning.

The meeting concluded with a group selfie, which Sheik joined reluctantly. ("I'm sort of selfie-conscious.") Out on the street, he shared his own Experience. Over the summer, he said, "I didn't have a show on Broadway, and my business manager was, like, 'You don't really have any money.'" Then the Deaf West Theatre, in Los Angeles, announced that its production of "Spring Awakening" would transfer to Broadway. Sheik's agent told him how much he would make from the run: a surprisingly paltry sum, until he clarified that the number was *per week*. "As well as making this beautiful version of the show, they saved my ass," Sheik said, adding, "My ability to have equanimity about that I attribute to my Buddhist practice." Now he's using the "Spring Awakening" money to help fund other projects, including a cast album for his musical adaptation of the Bret

Easton Ellis novel “American Psycho,” which will come to Broadway next spring. And which life state was he in? “Realization,” he said, before biking uptown. “It’s the realization that I have a lot of shit to do.”

—Michael Schulman

## THE PICTURES DOPPELGÄNGER



Seth Rogen had some questions, and Woz had some answers. The actor and the engineer, Steve (Woz) Wozniak, got acquainted during the making of the new film “Steve Jobs,” in which Rogen plays Woz, who founded Apple Computer with Jobs. They recently met again for an advance look at “Silicon City,” an exhibition, at the New-York Historical Society, about innovations in technology.

Rogen, who arrived late and a bit glassy-eyed, examined a conference table covered with gizmos and homed in on the Picturephone Model 2, from 1969, a “Jetsons”-style precursor to Facetime. “How did it work?” he asked.

Woz, eager to explain the mechanics of everything, stroked his salt-and-pepper beard and admitted, “This size screen, over the phones of that day—I do not know the answer myself.”

Rogen uttered his distinctive cartoon-dog chuckle. He bent over “The-sus Mouse,” a rudimentary fifties rodent with a tail, and said, “And is this the first mouse? Ha-ha, got you!”

“Actually, it is,” Woz replied. His explanation of how the magnetized mouse could run a maze led him, eventually, to the emergence of artificial intelligence. After nodding along for a while, Rogen said, “They won’t just kill us all, right?”

“No,” Woz reassured him. “If computers get smarter than humans, they’re going to realize, ‘Nature’s important, and humans are a part of nature, and we should work on solving the problems of the world.’ Some of them will even be movie directors—”

“Uh-oh.”

Woz noted that the difficulty in emulating human consciousness lay in replicating memory: “It seems to be everywhere in the brain, like a hologram.”

“Could there be inherited memories?”

Rogen wondered. “My dog, whenever she eats, she wipes her face off like there’s blood on it. And she’s lived on a couch her whole life.” The men regarded each other curiously.

In the film, written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Danny Boyle, we see Jobs, the master showman, preparing to introduce three new computers, across a span of fourteen years, and sparring each time with his workplace family. Rogen’s Woz repeatedly tries to get Jobs to publicly acknowledge the team behind the Apple II, the company’s only profit center. No dice. At last, Woz, who built the first Apple II himself, calls Jobs an asshole and declares, “I am tired of being Ringo when I know I was John!”

Woz said, “I was so glad with the way Seth portrayed me. If I’d had the nerve to say those things in real life, to say the truth—which is that Steve couldn’t execute, and all *his* products, from Apple III

to the Lisa to the Macintosh, *failed*—that’s how I would have wanted to say them. Politely and respectfully.”

“Well, it was fun to seem smart,” Rogen said. “The movie is very confrontational, because drama is all about conflict. But you’re maybe the least confrontational person I’ve ever met. You’re easygoing, you’re happy—”

“I could tell you a story I may never have told in public,” Woz said.

“O.K.”

“I left Apple—though I was still officially Employee 1—to make a universal remote control. We hired the design company Steve used, Frog Design—”

“You did tell me this!”

—for our remote-control casing.

Steve came by on his bicycle and saw they were doing work for me. He threw the parts against the wall and said, ‘Put them in a box and ship them to me. I own everything you do.’”

“And did you confront him after *that*?”

Woz shook his head. “Because we were always friends, you know, even when he thought we weren’t.” Wistfully, he added, “In the movie, Steve Jobs says to me, ‘I play the orchestra. And you’re a good musician, you sit right there, you’re the best in your row.’ I would have preferred *me* to have said, ‘But I’m the best in my row and *every* row.’” Then, brightening, he said that Jobs deserved enormous credit, later, for introducing the iPod and understanding the importance of the Cloud.

“I don’t keep my photos on the Cloud,” Rogen said. “I have hacking issues”—a reference to the Sony Entertainment hack apparently provoked by Rogen’s film “The Interview.”

Woz frowned and said, “I use Siri more than anything else in my life.”

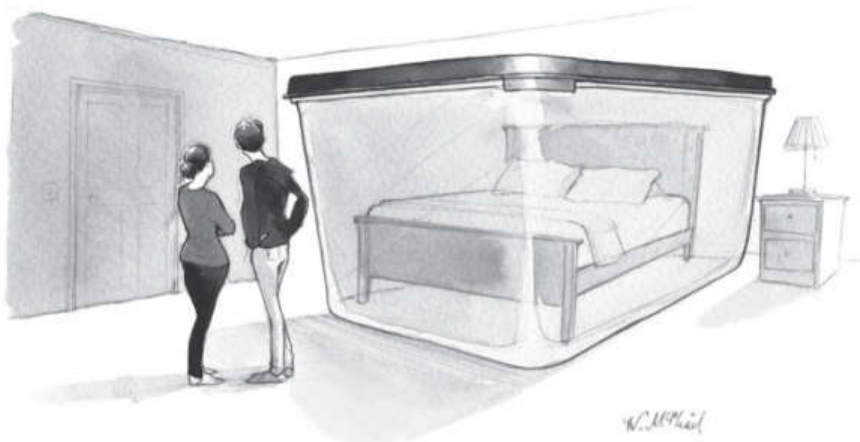
“Really?” Rogen asked. “For what?”

Woz shot his sleeve and addressed his Apple Watch in a presentational manner: “Hey, Siri—‘What is the tallest mountain in New York?’” Long pause. “It says, ‘Use your phone to search.’ O.K., let me see if Siri knows some really weird words. ‘Hey Siri—‘What is *e<sup>in</sup>*?’” He frowned. “It thought I said ‘iPod.’ But I’m sticking with it!”

“Because you think it’ll get better?” Rogen said, indicating the march of progress behind them.

“Because it’s family.”

—Tad Friend



“I’m just trying to keep things fresh.”



## THE FINANCIAL PAGE TAKING ON THE N.R.A.

In the wake of the massacre at Umpqua Community College, in Oregon, Hillary Clinton promised that if she is elected President she will use executive power to make it harder for people to buy guns without background checks. Meanwhile, Ben Carson, one of the Republican Presidential candidates, said, "I never saw a body with bullet holes that was more devastating than taking the right to arm ourselves away." The two responses could hardly have been more different, but both were testaments to the power of a single organization: the National Rifle Association. Clinton invoked executive action because the N.R.A. has made it unthinkable that a Republican-controlled Congress could pass meaningful gun-control legislation. Carson found it expedient to make his comment because the N.R.A. has shaped the public discourse around guns, in one of the most successful P.R. (or propaganda, depending on your perspective) campaigns of all time.

In many accounts, the power of the N.R.A. comes down to money. The organization has an annual operating budget of some quarter of a billion dollars, and between 2000 and 2010 it spent fifteen times as much on campaign contributions as gun-control advocates did. But money is less crucial than you'd think. The N.R.A.'s annual lobbying budget is around three million dollars, which is about a fifteenth of what, say, the National Association of Realtors spends. The N.R.A.'s biggest asset isn't cash but the devotion of its members. Adam Winkler, a law professor at U.C.L.A. and the author of the 2011 book "Gunfight," told me, "N.R.A. members are politically engaged and politically active. They call and write elected officials, they show up to vote, and they vote based on the gun issue." In one revealing study, people who were in favor of permits for gun owners described themselves as more invested in the issue than gun-rights supporters did. Yet people in the latter group were four times as likely to have donated money and written a politician about the issue.

The N.R.A.'s ability to mobilize is a classic example of what the advertising guru David Ogilvy called the power of one "big idea." Beginning in the nineteen-seventies, the N.R.A. relentlessly promoted the view that the right to own a gun is sacrosanct. Playing on fear of rising crime rates and distrust of government, it transformed the terms of the debate. As Ladd Everitt, of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, told me, "Gun-control people were rattling off public-health statistics to make their case, while the N.R.A. was connecting gun rights to core American values like individ-

ualism and personal liberty." The success of this strategy explains things that otherwise look anomalous, such as the refusal to be conciliatory even after killings that you'd think would be P.R. disasters. After the massacre of schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut, the N.R.A.'s C.E.O. sent a series of e-mails to his members warning them that anti-gun forces were going to use it to "ban your guns" and "destroy the Second Amendment."

The idea that gun rights are perpetually under threat has been a staple of the N.R.A.'s message for the past four decades. Yet, for most of that period, the gun-control movement was disorganized and ineffective. Today, the landscape is changing. "Newtown really marked a major turning point in America's gun debate," Winkler said. "We've seen a completely new, reinvigorated gun-control movement, one that has much more grassroots support, and that's now being backed by real money." Michael Bloomberg's Super PAC, Independence USA, has spent millions backing gun-control

candidates, and he's pledged fifty million dollars to the cause. Campaigners have become more effective in pushing for gun-control measures, particularly at the local and state level: in Washington State last year, a referendum to expand background checks got almost sixty per cent of the vote. There are even signs that the N.R.A.'s ability to make or break politicians could be waning; senators it has given F ratings have been reelected in purple states. Indeed, Hillary Clinton's embrace of gun control is telling: previously, Democratic Presidential candidates tended to shy away from the issue.

These shifts, plus the fact that demographics are not in the N.R.A.'s favor (Latino and urban voters mostly support gun control), might make it seem that the N.R.A.'s dominance is ebbing. But, if so, that has yet to show up in the numbers. A Pew survey last December found that a majority of Americans thought protecting gun rights was more important than gun control. Fifteen years before, the same poll found that sixty-six per cent of Americans thought that gun control mattered more. And last year, despite all the new money and the grassroots campaigns, states passed more laws expanding gun rights than restricting them.

What is true is that the N.R.A. at last has worthy opponents. The gun-control movement is far more pragmatic than it once was. When the N.R.A. took up the banner of gun rights, in the seventies, gun-control advocates were openly prohibitionist. (The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence was originally called the National Coalition to Ban Handguns.) Today, they're respectful of gun owners and focussed on screening and background checks. That's a sensible strategy. It's also an accommodation to the political reality that the N.R.A. created.

—James Surowiecki



## THRESHOLDS OF VIOLENCE

*How school shootings catch on.*

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL



On the evening of April 29th last year, in the southern Minnesota town of Waseca, a woman was doing the dishes when she looked out her kitchen window and saw a young man walking through her back yard. He was wearing a backpack and carrying a fast-food bag and was headed in the direction of the MiniMax Storage facility next to her house. Something about him didn't seem right. Why was he going through her yard instead of using the sidewalk? He walked through puddles, not around them. He fiddled with the lock of Unit 129 as if he were trying to break in. She called the police. A group of three officers arrived

and rolled up the unit's door. The young man was standing in the center. He was slight of build, with short-cropped brown hair and pale skin. Scattered around his feet was an assortment of boxes and containers: motor oil, roof cement, several Styrofoam coolers, a can of ammunition, a camouflage bag, and cardboard boxes labelled "red iron oxide," filled with a red powder. His name was John LaDue. He was seventeen years old.

One of the officers started to pat LaDue down. According to the police report, "LaDue immediately became defensive, stating that it is his storage unit and asked what I was doing and

pulling away." The officers asked him to explain what he was up to. LaDue told them to guess. Another of the officers, Tim Schroeder, said he thought LaDue was making bombs. LaDue admitted that he was, but said that he didn't want to talk about it in the storage locker. The four went back to the Waseca police station, and LaDue and Schroeder sat down together with a tape recorder between them. "What's going on today, John?" Schroeder asked. LaDue replied, "It's going to be hard for me to talk about." The interview began at 7:49 P.M. It continued for almost three hours.

He was making Molotov cocktails, LaDue said, but a deadlier variant of the traditional kind, using motor oil and tar instead of gasoline. From there, he intended to move on to bigger and more elaborate pressure-cooker bombs, of the sort used by the Tsarnaev brothers at the Boston Marathon bombing. "There are far more things out in that unit than meet the eye," he told Schroeder, listing various kinds of explosive powder, thousands of ball bearings, pipes for pipe bombs, fifteen pounds of potassium perchlorate, nine pounds of aluminum powder, and "magnesium ribbon and rust which I use to make thermite, which burns at five thousand degrees Celsius."

Schroeder asked him what his intentions were.

"I have a notebook under my bed that explains it," LaDue replied.

Schroeder: "O.K. Can you talk to me about those intentions that are in the notebook?"

LaDue: "O.K. Sometime before the end of the school year, my plan was to steal a recycling bin from the school and take one of the pressure cookers I made and put it in the hallway and blow it up during passing period time. . . . I would detonate when people were fleeing, just like the Boston bombings, and blow them up too. Then my plans were to enter and throw Molotov cocktails and pipe bombs and destroy everyone and then when the SWAT comes I would destroy myself."

In his bedroom, he had an SKS assault rifle with sixty rounds of ammunition, a Beretta 9-mm. handgun, a gun safe with an additional firearm,

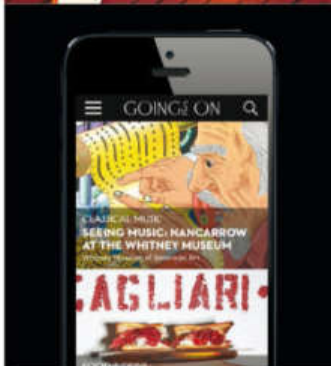
*In the years since Columbine, school shootings changed; they became ritualized.*



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and three ready-made explosive devices. On the day of the attack, he would start with a .22-calibre rifle and move on to a shotgun, in order to prove that high-capacity assault-style rifles were unnecessary for an effective school attack.

Schroeder: "Do you have brothers and sisters?"

LaDue: "Yes, I have a sister. She's one year older than me."

Schroeder: "O.K. She goes to school too?"

LaDue: "Yes."

Schroeder: "She's a senior?"

LaDue: "She is."

Schroeder: "O.K. So you would have done this stuff while she was at school as well?"

LaDue: "I forgot to mention a detail. Before that day, I was planning to dispose of my family too."

Schroeder: "Why would you dispose of your family? What, what have they done?"

LaDue: "They did nothing wrong. I just wanted as many victims as possible."

On February 2, 1996, in Moses Lake, Washington, a fourteen-year-old named Barry Loukaitis walked into Frontier Middle School dressed in a black duster and carrying two handguns, seventy-eight rounds of ammunition, and a hunting rifle. He killed two students and wounded a third before shooting his algebra teacher in the back. In the next two years, there were six more major incidents, in quick succession: sixteen-year-old Evan Ramsey, in Bethel, Alaska; sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham, in Pearl, Mississippi; fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal, in West Paducah, Kentucky; thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and eleven-year-old Andrew Golden, in Jonesboro, Arkansas; fourteen-year-old Andrew Wurst, in Edinboro, Pennsylvania; and fifteen-year-old Kip Kinkel, in Springfield, Oregon. In April of 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold launched their infamous attack on Columbine High, in Littleton, Colorado, and from there the slaughter has continued, through the thirty-two killed and seventeen wounded by Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Tech, in 2007; the twenty-six killed by Adam Lanza at Sandy Hook

Elementary School, in 2012; and the nine killed by Christopher Harper-Mercer earlier this month at Umpqua Community College, in Oregon. Since Sandy Hook, there have been more than a hundred and forty school shootings in the United States.

School shootings are a modern phenomenon. There were scattered instances of gunmen or bombers attacking schools in the years before Barry Loukaitis, but they were lower profile. School shootings mostly involve young white men. And, not surprisingly, given the ready availability of firearms in the United States, the phenomenon is overwhelmingly American. But, beyond those facts, the great puzzle is how little school shooters fit any kind of pattern.

Evan Ramsey, who killed his mother and then walked into his high school with a 12-gauge shotgun, had a chaotic home life. His mother was an alcoholic who lived with a series of violent men. In one two-year stretch, he lived in ten foster homes and was both sexually and physically abused. When Evan was six, his father sent an ad to the local newspaper which it declined to publish, so he packed two guns, chained the door of the newspaper, set off smoke grenades, and held the publisher at gunpoint.

But Kip Kinkel, who shot his parents, then killed two others and wounded twenty-five at his high school, had not been traumatized. He had a loving family. He was the child of schoolteachers so beloved that seventeen hundred people came to their memorial service. Kinkel was psychotic: he thought the Chinese were preparing to attack the United States, that Disney had plans for world domination, and that the government had placed a computer chip inside his head.

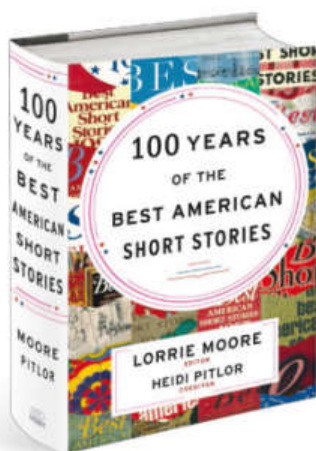
Meanwhile, the architect of the Columbine killings, Eric Harris, was a classic psychopath. He was charming and manipulative. He was a habitual lawbreaker: he stole, vandalized, bought guns illegally, set off homemade bombs, and at one point hacked into his school's computer system. He wrote "*Ich bin Gott*"—German for "I am God"—in his school planner. His journals were filled with fantasies about rape and mutilation:



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“I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to their heart.” A school shooter, it appears, could be someone who had been brutally abused by the world or someone who imagined that the world brutally abused him or someone who wanted to brutally abuse the world himself.

The LaDue case does not resolve this puzzle. LaDue doesn’t hear voices. He isn’t emotional or malicious or angry or vindictive. Schroeder asks him about violent games, and he says he hasn’t been playing them much recently. Then they talk about violent music, and LaDue says he’s been playing guitar for eight years and has little patience for the “retarded” music of “bands like Bullet for My Valentine or Asking Alexandria or some crap like that.” He likes Metallica: solid, normal, old-school heavy metal. “I was not bullied at all,” LaDue tells Schroeder. “I don’t think I have ever been bullied in my life. . . . I have good parents. I live in a good town.”

When the interview is concluded, the police drive over to see LaDue’s parents. They live a few minutes away, in a tidy two-story stucco house on a corner lot. The LaDues are frantic. It is 10:30 P.M., and their son is never out past nine on a school night. His mother is trying to track him down on her laptop through his cell-phone account. They are calling all the people he has most recently texted, trying to find him. Then the police arrive with the news that their son has threatened to kill his family and blow up Waseca High School—and the LaDues are forced to account for a fact entirely outside their imagining. No, his son has never been diagnosed with mental illness or depression, David LaDue, John’s father, tells the police. He isn’t taking any medication. He’s never expressed a desire to hurt anyone. He spends a lot of time in front of his computer looking at YouTube videos. He likes to experiment with what his father calls his “interesting devices.” He wears a lot of black. Isn’t that what teen-agers do? David LaDue is desperate to come

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up with something—anything—to make sense of what he has just been told. “David told me that after his son had stayed with his brother for a couple of months at the beginning of last summer, he had returned proclaiming to be an atheist, stating that he no longer believed in religion,” the police report says.

Then:

David LaDue also spoke of an incident when Austin Walters and John LaDue had gone deer hunting. John had reportedly shot a deer that had not died right away and had to be “finished off.” David LaDue stated that he heard that Austin’s cell phone was used to make a video of the deer that he felt was inappropriate, although he had never seen the video. David LaDue showed me a photo on his laptop of John LaDue leering, holding a semi-automatic rifle next to a deer that had been killed. David LaDue pointed to the picture stating that “this” was the facial expression he was talking about that he thought was concerning.

It is the best he can do.

It was the best anyone could do that night. Waseca is a community of some ten thousand people amid the cornfields of southern Minnesota: one high school, a Walmart, a beautiful lake just outside town. Minneapolis is well over an hour away. There was simply no room, in anyone’s cultural understanding, for the acts John LaDue was describing. By the end, a kind of fatigue seemed to set in, and the normal codes of Midwestern civility reasserted themselves. All that the interrogation or

confession or conversation—whatever it was—between Schroeder and LaDue seems to have established is that we need a new way to make sense of the school-shooting phenomenon.

Schroeder: “Until we can figure out, ah, what exactly is where we are all at, we’re just going to take you up and, um, put you in a cell, or holding cell for the time being, until we can get it figured out.”

LaDue: “O.K.”

Schroeder: “O.K.”

LaDue: “Hmm, hmm.”

Schroeder: “I’ll let you put your shoes on. Yah, I’ll hold on to your phone for now. . . . All right. Before we, I’ll let you put your shoes on.”

LaDue: “I’m wearing contacts by the way. What should I do with them?”

Schroeder: “You can keep them in.”

LaDue: “O.K. . . . Are you going to handcuff me?”

Schroeder: “I am going to cuff ya.”

LaDue: [inaudible]

Schroeder: “I’m going to double pat you down again.”

Then, almost apologetically, he adds, “I know I already did once.”

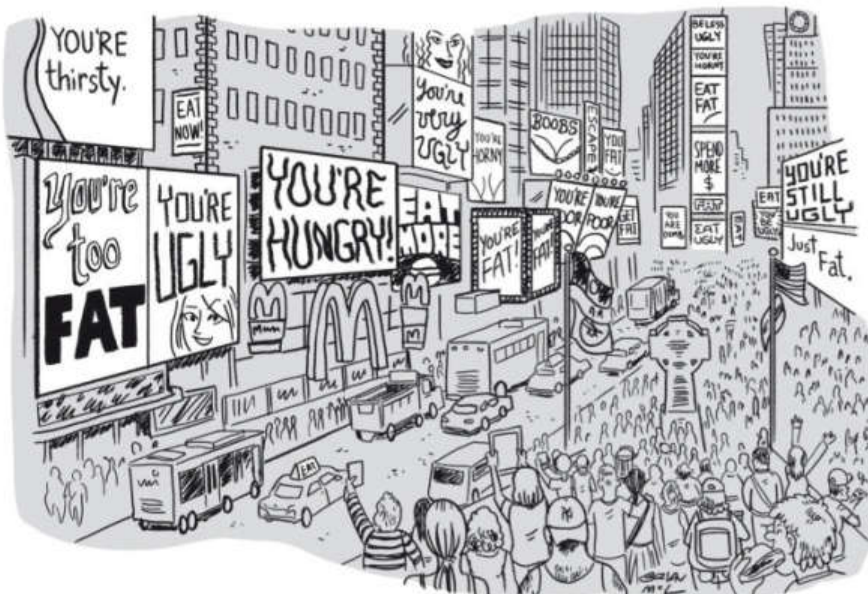
In a famous essay published four decades ago, the Stanford sociologist Mark Granovetter set out to explain a paradox: “situations where outcomes do not seem intuitively consistent with the underlying individual preferences.” What explains a person or a group of people doing things that seem at odds

with who they are or what they think is right? Granovetter took riots as one of his main examples, because a riot is a case of destructive violence that involves a great number of otherwise quite normal people who would not usually be disposed to violence.

Most previous explanations had focussed on explaining how someone’s beliefs might be altered in the moment. An early theory was that a crowd cast a kind of intoxicating spell over its participants. Then the argument shifted to the idea that rioters might be rational actors: maybe at the moment a riot was beginning people changed their beliefs. They saw what was at stake and recalculated their estimations of the costs and benefits of taking part.

But Granovetter thought it was a mistake to focus on the decision-making processes of each rioter in isolation. In his view, a riot was not a collection of individuals, each of whom arrived independently at the decision to break windows. A riot was a social process, in which people did things in reaction to and in combination with those around them. Social processes are driven by our *thresholds*—which he defined as the number of people who need to be doing some activity before we agree to join them. In the elegant theoretical model Granovetter proposed, riots were started by people with a threshold of zero—instigators willing to throw a rock through a window at the slightest provocation. Then comes the person who will throw a rock if someone else goes first. He has a threshold of one. Next in is the person with the threshold of two. His qualms are overcome when he sees the instigator and the instigator’s accomplice. Next to him is someone with a threshold of three, who would never break windows and loot stores unless there were three people right in front of him who were already doing that—and so on up to the hundredth person, a righteous upstanding citizen who nonetheless could set his beliefs aside and grab a camera from the broken window of the electronics store if *everyone* around him were grabbing cameras from the electronics store.

Granovetter was most taken by the situations in which people did things





for social reasons that went against everything they believed as individuals. “Most did not think it ‘right’ to commit illegal acts or even particularly want to do so,” he wrote, about the findings of a study of delinquent boys. “But group interaction was such that none could admit this without loss of status; in our terms, their threshold for stealing cars is low because daring masculine acts bring status, and reluctance to join, once others have, carries the high cost of being labeled a sissy.” You can’t just look at an individual’s norms and motives. You need to look at the *group*.

His argument has a second implication. We misleadingly use the word “copycat” to describe contagious behavior—implying that new participants in an epidemic act in a manner identical to the source of their infection. But rioters are not homogeneous. If a riot evolves as it spreads, starting with the hotheaded rock thrower and ending with the upstanding citizen, then rioters are a profoundly heterogeneous group.

Finally, Granovetter’s model suggests that riots are sometimes more than spontaneous outbursts. If they evolve, it means they have depth and length and a history. Granovetter thought that the threshold hypothesis could be used to describe everything from elections to strikes, and even matters as prosaic as how people decide it’s time to leave a party. He was writing in 1978, long before teen-age boys made a habit of wandering through their high schools with assault rifles. But what if the way to explain the school-shooting epidemic is to go back and use the Granovetterian model—to think of it as a slow-motion, ever-evolving riot, in which each new participant’s action makes sense in reaction to and in combination with those who came before?

The first seven major shooting cases—Loukaitis, Ramsey, Woodham, Carneal, Johnson and Golden, Wurst, and Kinkel—were disconnected and idiosyncratic. Loukaitis was obsessed with Stephen King’s novel “Rage” (written under King’s pseudonym Richard Bachman), about

a high-school student who kills his algebra teacher with a handgun. Kip Kinkel, on the morning of his attack, played Wagner’s “Liebestod” aria over and over. Evan Ramsey’s father thought his son was under the influence of the video game Doom. The parents of several of Michael Carneal’s victims sued the makers and distributors of the movie “The Basketball Diaries.”

Then came Columbine. The sociologist Ralph Larkin argues that Harris and Klebold laid down the “cultural script” for the next generation of shooters. They had a Web site. They made home movies starring themselves as hit men. They wrote lengthy manifestos. They recorded their “basement tapes.” Their motivations were spelled out with grandiose specificity: Harris said he wanted to “kick-start a revolution.” Larkin looked at the twelve major school shootings in the United States in the eight years after Columbine, and he found that in eight of those subsequent cases the shooters made explicit reference to Harris and Klebold. Of the eleven school shootings outside the United States between 1999 and 2007, Larkin says six were plainly versions of Columbine; of the eleven cases of thwarted shootings in the same period, Larkin says all were Columbine-inspired.

Along the same lines, the sociologist Nathalie E. Paton has analyzed the online videos created by post-Columbine shooters and found a recurring set of stylized images: a moment where the killer points his gun at the camera, then at his own temple, and then spreads his arms wide with a gun in each hand; the closeup; the wave goodbye at the end. “School shooters explicitly name or represent each other,” she writes. She mentions one who “refers to Cho as a brother-in-arms”; another who “points out that his cultural tastes are like those of Eric and Dylan”; a third who “uses images from the Columbine shooting surveillance camera and devotes several videos to the Columbine killers.” And she notes, “This aspect underlines the

fact that the boys actively take part in associating themselves to a group.”

Larkin and Paton are describing the dynamics of Granovetter’s threshold model of group behavior. Luke Woodham, the third in this progression, details in his journal how he and a friend tortured his dog, Sparkle: “I will never forget the howl she made. It sounded almost human. We laughed and hit her hard.” A low-threshold participant like Woodham didn’t need anyone to model his act of violence for him: his imagination was more than up to the task.



But compare him to a post-Columbine shooter like Darion Aguilar, the nineteen-year-old who last year killed two people in a skate shop in a

Maryland shopping mall before killing himself. Aguilar wanted to be a chef. He had a passion for plant biology. He was quiet, but not marginalized or bullied. “He was a good person. He always believe[d] in inner peace,” a friend of his told the *Washington Post*. “He was just a really funny guy.” In the months before the shooting, he went to a doctor, complaining of hearing voices—but his voices were, according to police, “non-specific, non-violent and really not directing him to do anything.” The kid who wants to be a chef and hears “non-specific, non-violent” voices requires a finely elaborated script in order to carry out his attack. That’s what Paton and Larkin mean: the effect of Harris and Klebold’s example was to make it possible for people with far higher thresholds—boys who would ordinarily never think of firing a weapon at their classmates—to join in the riot. Aguilar dressed up like Eric Harris. He used the same weapons as Harris. He wore a backpack like Harris’s. He hid in the changing room of the store until 11:14 A.M.—the precise time when the Columbine incident began—and then came out shooting. A few months later, Aaron Ybarra walked onto the campus of Seattle Pacific University and shot three people, one fatally. Afterward, he told police that he could never have done it without “the guidance of, of Eric Harris and



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Seung-Hui Cho in my head.... Especially, Eric Harris, he was a, oh, man he was a master of all shooters."

Between Columbine and Aaron Ybarra, the riot changed: it became more and more self-referential, more ritualized, more and more about identification with the school-shooting tradition. Eric Harris wanted to start a revolution. Aguilar and Ybarra wanted to join one. Harris saw himself as a hero. Aguilar and Ybarra were hero-worshippers.

Now imagine that the riot takes a big step further along the progression—to someone with an even higher threshold, for whom the group identification and immersion in the culture of school shooting are even more dominant considerations. That's John LaDue. "There is one that you probably never heard of like back in 1927 and his name was Arthur Kehoe," LaDue tells Schroeder. "He killed like forty-five with, like, dynamite and stuff." Ybarra was a student of Virginia Tech and Columbine. LaDue is a scholar of the genre, who speaks of his influences the way a budding filmmaker might talk about Fellini or Bergman. "The other one was Charles Whitman. I don't know if you knew who that was. He was who they called

the sniper at the Austin Texas University. He was an ex-marine. He got like sixteen, quite impressive."

LaDue had opinions. He didn't like the "cowards" who would shoot themselves as soon as the police showed up. He disapproved of Adam Lanza, because he shot kindergartners at Sandy Hook instead of people his own age: "That's just pathetic. Have some dignity, damn it." He didn't like some "shaking schizophrenic dude you'd look at in class and move away from." He preferred a certain subtlety, "someone you'd say, I never knew he would do something like that. Someone you would not suspect." One person fit the bill: "My number one idol is Eric Harris. . . . I think I just see myself in him. Like he would be the kind of guy I'd want to be with. Like, if I knew him, I just thought he was cool."

John LaDue was charged with four counts of attempted murder, two counts of damage to property, and six counts of possession of explosives. It did not take long, however, for the case to run into difficulty. The first problem was that under Minnesota law telling a police officer of your plans to kill someone does not rise to the level of attempted murder, and the

most serious of the charges against LaDue were dismissed.

The second problem was more complicated. The prosecution saw someone who wanted to be Eric Harris and plainly assumed that meant he must be like Eric Harris, that there must be a dark heart below LaDue's benign exterior. But the lesson of the Granovetterian progression, of course, is that this isn't necessarily true: the longer a riot goes on, the less the people who join it resemble the people who started it. As Granovetter writes, it is a mistake to assume "that if most members of a group make the same behavior decision—to join a riot, for example—we can infer from this that most ended up sharing the same norm or belief about the situation, whether or not they did at the beginning." And this June, at a hearing where the results of LaDue's psychiatric evaluation were presented, it became clear just how heterogeneous the riot had become.

The day's testimony began with the forensic psychologist Kathryn Cranbrook. She had interviewed LaDue for two and a half hours. She said she had examined many juveniles implicated in serious crimes, and they often had an escalating history of aggression, theft, fighting at school, and other antisocial behaviors. LaDue did not. He had, furthermore, been given the full battery of tests for someone in his position—the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY), the youth version of the Psychopathy Checklists (PCL), and the Risk Sophistication Treatment Inventory (R.S.T.I.)—and the results didn't raise any red flags. He wasn't violent or mentally ill. His problem was something far more benign. He was simply a little off. "He has rather odd usage, somewhat overly formal language," Cranbrook said. "He appears to lack typical relational capacity for family members.... He indicates that he would have completed the actions, but he doesn't demonstrate any concern or empathy for the impact that that could have had on others." The conclusion of all three of the psychologists who spoke at the hearing was that LaDue had a mild-to-moderate case of autism: he had an autism-spectrum disorder (A.S.D.), or what used to be called Asperger's syndrome.



The revelation turned the case upside down. The fact that LaDue confessed to Schroeder so readily made him sound cold-blooded. But it turns out that this is typical of people on the autism spectrum in their encounters with police: their literal-mindedness leads them to answer questions directly. LaDue was fascinated—as many teen-age boys are—by guns and explosions. But he didn't know the acceptable way to express those obsessions. "John has a tendency to say sort of jarring things without much ability to gauge their impact on people," Mary Kenning, another of the psychologists who examined him, said at the hearing. He spoke without empathy when he discussed killing his family, which made him sound like a psychopath. But the empathy deficits of the people on the autism spectrum—which leaves them socially isolated and vulnerable to predation—are worlds apart from those of the psychopath, whose deficits are put to use in the cause of manipulation and exploitation.

Much of what is so disturbing about LaDue's exchanges with Schroeder, in fact, is simply his version of the quintessential A.S.D. symptom of "restricted range of interests." He's obsessive. He insists on applying logic and analysis to things that most of us know we aren't supposed to be logical and analytical about. What should he wear? The standard uniform for school shooters is a duster. But it didn't make sense to wear a duster to school, LaDue explained, "because that's a bit suspicious." He'd store it in his locker. Where should the bombs go? Harris and Klebold had chosen the cafeteria. But LaDue felt that was too obvious—and, logistically, placing them in the hallway by the water fountains made more sense. When should he attack? April made the best sense, "because that's the month that all the really bad tragedies happened like ... Titanic, Columbine, Oklahoma City bombing, Boston bombing." And what went wrong at Columbine, anyway? It was supposed to be a bomb attack. So why didn't the devices planted by Harris and Klebold explode? "They were trying to create a circuit which would ignite some gasoline to hit the propane and cause a BLEVE—which is a boiling liquid expanding vapor ex-

plosion ... which is basically the same thing as say a pipe bomb except with, like, gases," LaDue patiently explained to Schroeder, before launching into a long technical digression on the relative merits of hydrazine, ammonium perchlorate, Cheddite, nitroglycerin, and flash powder. He was even more scathing about the Boston bombers' use of pressure-cooker bombs. He thought they made a "crappy design of it." They used nails and black powder from fireworks. It would have made far more sense to use flash powder and ball bearings, LaDue thought, because "spherical shrapnel" are "superior to nails in damage." LaDue tells Schroeder that he has two YouTube channels devoted to his work. But anyone who watches the assembled videos expecting to see something macabre will be disappointed. They are home movies of LaDue testing whether tiny fuses will ignite when placed inside a plastic water bottle, or whether he can successfully blow a quarter-size hole in the side of a plastic playground slide. In the world before Columbine, people like LaDue played with chemistry sets in their basements and dreamed of being astronauts.

The idea that people with autism-spectrum disorders can stumble into patterns of serious criminality has a name: counterfeit deviance. It has long been an issue in cases involving A.S.D. teen-agers and child pornography. "They are intellectually intact people, with good computer skills but extraordinary brain-based naïveté, acting in social isolation, compulsively pursuing interests which often unknowingly take them into forbidden territory," the lawyer Mark J. Mahoney writes in a recent paper. They come upon an online image that appeals to their immature sexuality and don't understand its social and legal implications. The image might be "marked" for the rest of us, because the child is in some kind of distress. But those kinds of emotional signals are precisely what A.S.D. teen-agers struggle to understand. They start to obsessively collect similar images, not out of some twisted sexual urge but simply because that's the way their curiosity is configured. What gets these young adults into trouble with

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the law “is not abnormal sexual desires,” Mahoney writes, “but their tendency to express or pursue normal interests in a manner outside social conventions.”

Was John LaDue’s deviance counterfeit? He told Cranbrook that he would have gone ahead with his plan had he not been stopped, and she believed him. The second of the psychologists to examine him, James Gilbertson, also felt that LaDue’s threat was real: his obsessive preparation had created a powerful momentum toward action. But at every turn his reluctance and ambivalence was apparent: he was the ninety-ninth person in, warily eying the rock. At one point, Schroeder asked him why, if April—as the month of Titanic, Waco, Oklahoma City, and Columbine—was so critical symbolically, he hadn’t attacked the school already. It was April 29th, after all. LaDue, who had been a model of lucidity throughout, was suddenly flustered. “Um, I wanted to do it around April, but I decided not to do it April 19th because I think, no, April 19th wouldn’t work, because that was a Saturday, I think April 14th was it, because, um, I figured I didn’t want to do it April 18th because I figured, because 4/20 was coming up”—4/20 being national marijuana day—“and I figured maybe they would have some dogs there, and find the stuff I had planted in the hallway.... But that’s not the case now, cause now it’s May and I just wanted to get it done before school was out.”

He had planned every aspect of the attack meticulously, except for the part where he actually launches the attack. He was uncomfortable. When Schroeder pressed him further, he came up with more excuses. “I had a cooker to buy,” he said, meaning he had yet to purchase the central component of his bombs. And then: “I had to steal a shotgun too.” He had been stalling, prolonging the planning, delaying the act. Then the two of them started talking about ammunition, and LaDue came up with a third excuse: he had bought twenty clips, but “they didn’t fit on the bolt because they were too wide and they had a feeding problem going in there.”

The low-threshold shooters were

in the grip of powerful grievances. But LaDue doesn’t seem to have any real grievances. In his notebooks, instead, he seems to spend a good deal of effort trying to manufacture them from scratch. School-shooter protocol called for him to kill his parents. But he *likes* his parents. “He sees them as good people, loving him, caring about him,” Gilbertson said. “But he has to take their life, according to [his] manifesto, to prove that he’s up to the task, to prove he has no human feelings anymore, that he’s scrubbed out.” After he set off a minor explosion at a local playground, he wrote a letter to the police. “I guess you guys never found it,” he said of the letter. “Did you? I put it in someone’s mailbox and told them to give it to you guys, but they never did.” He seems well aware that his obsession has put him on a dangerous course. “O.K, um, first, I’d like a check from a psychiatrist or something,” he says at one point. And then again: “I just want to find out what’s wrong with me actually”; “I more just want a psychiatric test and that’s really it, though”; “I wanted to ask [for a psychologist] many times, but, obviously, I didn’t want my parents knowing about it, because I wanted to keep it under the radar.” When the three policemen showed up at his storage locker, it must have been a relief. “I figured you guys would be looking for me,” he later told police.

The John LaDue case took a final turn last month. The hearing was at the Waseca County Courthouse, a forbidding Gothic building on the main downtown strip. LaDue, dressed in an orange jumpsuit with “Waseca County Prison” stencilled on the back, was led by two marshals. He had spent the previous seventeen months in a few different juvenile facilities before being transferred, in July, to the local prison. His hair was longer. He wore thick black-framed glasses. He didn’t look at any of the spectators who had come to the hearing. The prosecutor and LaDue’s attorney announced that they had reached a new plea agreement. LaDue would plead guilty to explosives charges in exchange for an extended course of psychiatric treatment and five to ten years of proba-

tion. The judge walked him through the particulars of the plea deal, and he answered every question in a deep, oddly adult voice. He was respectful and polite, except when the prosecutor asked him if he understood the difference between an incendiary device and an explosive device. An explosive device, she added, as if she were talking to a child, was something that could “go boom.” When he answered (“Yep”), a brief flare of irritation entered his voice: *Are you kidding me?*

After the hearing, David LaDue stood on the sidewalk in front of the courthouse and answered questions. He is shorter and stockier than his son, forceful and direct. He said that in order to meet with John the previous evening—and discuss the plea deal—he had to work two sixteen-hour shifts in succession. He was exhausted. He was there, he said, “because I love him, I can’t let go and walk away and forget about it and put it out of my mind.” He wanted to remind the world that his son was human. “He had love,” LaDue said. “He liked affection like anybody else. I saw the expression on his face when he talked to his sister. I saw things in him that he would, certainly at that time, would have denied.” He talked about how difficult it was for men—and for teen-age boys in particular—to admit to vulnerability. “You know, he graduated at the top from Prairie Lake,” he continued, proudly, referring to the juvenile-detention facility where his son had finished his final year of high school. “He got an A in calculus. We were mailed his diploma.... There’s no way I could have done that.”

In the day of Eric Harris, we could try to console ourselves with the thought that there was nothing we could do, that no law or intervention or restrictions on guns could make a difference in the face of someone so evil. But the riot has now engulfed the boys who were once content to play with chemistry sets in the basement. The problem is not that there is an endless supply of deeply disturbed young men who are willing to contemplate horrific acts. It’s worse. It’s that young men no longer need to be deeply disturbed to contemplate horrific acts. ♦



## NEW HARLEQUIN TITLES

BY CORA FRAZIER

Midnight Rose was restless that morning. Martha was taking off the horse's saddle when she heard a sound. It was Augustus, the new stableboy, not yet eighteen. He strode in wearing tan jodhpurs and black boots. He appeared to have just woken, and was tucking a translucent white shirt into his pants and smoothing his long brown locks across his forehead.

He and Martha exchanged glances, and he turned and walked out of the stable. Her heart beating fast, she followed Augustus into the early morning. The sun was rising pink and orange above the lake.

On the bank of the glittering water, she watched as Augustus stripped naked and jumped in. Martha began to unbutton her muslin dress. She wasn't afraid of the Redcoats, although she did fear the reproach of her father, General Washington. In nothing but her white cotton bloomers, she, too, dove into the lake.

When Martha surfaced, she saw Augustus and another young man in an embrace above the water.

Oh! thought Martha.

Martha, in her wet bloomers, carrying her dress, decided to use the kitchen entrance so that she wouldn't be spotted. She opened the door quietly.

General Washington was holding a meeting of his officers in the back study. She stood there, dripping, in her muddy drawers. The group of men regarded her for a moment. Then General Washington burst out laughing.

It was just the two of them at her grandmother's lighthouse that summer. It made sense that Carter would take Pippa to dinner at the only restaurant in town, a seafood place. Her grandmother offered to tie up her hair.

"Oh, Nana," Pippa said. "You know I'm not thinking about that."

"You can't grieve forever, darling," her grandmother told her.

Carter was waiting by the white gate at the bottom of the stone path. He'd brought a conch shell.

"I heard you collect them," he said.

"Yes," Pippa said. It *was* a beautiful conch.

Carter suggested that they share a bottle of rosé. In spite of herself, Pippa felt a blush rise on her cheeks.

The rosé arrived. Pippa swirled it



in her mouth—it had been nearly a year since she'd had wine.

Carter's phone was on top of the white tablecloth. It kept lighting up.

He looked at it. He laughed.

Pippa took another sip.

His phone lit up again. He looked at it. He laughed.

"God, I hate group texts," he said. "There's no way to get out of them." The phone lit up again. He tilted it toward him slightly and laughed.

"I think there is, actually . . .," Pippa said, swallowing a gulp of rosé.

Carter picked up his phone, looked at it, and laughed.

Carter glanced up, phone in hand. "What?" he said.

Eliza wished that she had not been kidnapped by pirates. Really, she did. But she had been at sea for nearly a week, and she was growing restless. She peered out onto the deck in the

gray evening. They were all standing around, drinking and talking.

She slid out onto the deck, unobserved. She walked up to the landing on the starboard side, where she was in full view. She let the strap of her bodice slip over the curve of her pale shoulder. She let a loose brown curl fall from her chignon.

"Bueller? Bueller? Bueller?" one of the pirates said. The pirates laughed.

Eliza sighed loudly, letting her fan drape down across the wooden partition. Not one of them looked up at her. "It's a bit deserted in the hold," Eliza said, loudly.

"No, it's . . .," one of them said. Eliza perked up.

"It's, like, 'Bueller?'" the pirate continued. The pirates laughed louder.

"I'm just going to—" Eliza took a few steps back toward the stairs. "I'll just be down . . . *Jesus Christ, does anyone have any reading material? A pamphlet, or something?*"

The pirates looked over at her.

"Bueller?"

He was a knight in King George's court. She was an orphan peasant who lived in an abandoned mill.

In the early morning, when she went to leave, the door to the parapet was stuck, and he had to use a power drill to get it open.

Blethenia didn't care that Jules was a merman and she was a fish-catcher. She was in love. She would give up her family, her friends, everything. And she had.

"I heard from the mechanic today," she said, lying on the dock, one hand in the water. Jules's tail was moving rapidly beneath the surface, out of view. "I think my electric fin is almost ready."

Jules sighed, pulled his goggles over his eyes, and made a few powerful pumps with his tail. "You're great, you know that?" he said, adjusting his goggles. "I hope you know that."

"Yes . . ."

Georgia got home and made tea. She took a shower and used her special walnut scrub. Then she got into bed with a book. ♦

## POND SCUM

*Henry David Thoreau's moral myopia.*

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



On the evening of October 6, 1849, the hundred and twenty people aboard the brig *St. John* threw a party. The *St. John* was a so-called famine ship: Boston-bound from Galway, it was filled with passengers fleeing the mass starvation then devastating Ireland. They had been at sea for a month; now, with less than a day's sail remaining, they celebrated the imminent end of their journey and, they hoped, the beginning of a better life in America. Early the next morning, the ship was caught in a northeaster, driven toward shore, and dashed upon the rocks just outside Cohasset Harbor. Those on deck were swept overboard. Those below deck drowned when the hull smashed open. Within an hour, the ship had broken up entirely. All but

nine crew members and roughly a dozen passengers perished.

Two days later, a thirty-two-year-old Massachusetts native, en route from Concord to Cape Cod, got word of the disaster and detoured to Cohasset to see it for himself. When he arrived, fragments of the wreck were scattered across the strand. Those victims who had already washed ashore lay in rough wooden boxes on a nearby hillside. The living were trying to identify the dead—a difficult task, since some of the bodies were bloated from drowning, while others had struck repeatedly against the rocks. Out of sentiment or to save labor, the bodies of children were placed alongside their mothers in the same coffin.

The visitor from Concord, surveying

all this, found himself unmoved. “On the whole,” he wrote, “it was not so impressive a scene as I might have expected. If I had found one body cast upon the beach in some lonely place, it would have affected me more. I sympathized rather with the winds and waves, as if to toss and mangle these poor human bodies was the order of the day. If this was the law of Nature, why waste any time in awe or pity?” This impassive witness also had stern words for those who, undone by the tragedy, could no longer enjoy strolling along the beach. Surely, he admonished, “its beauty was enhanced by wrecks like this, and it acquired thus a rarer and sublimer beauty still.”

Who was this cold-eyed man who saw in loss of life only aesthetic gain, who identified not with the drowned or the bereaved but with the storm? This was Henry David Thoreau, that great partisan of the pond, describing his visit to Cohasset in “Cape Cod.” That book is not particularly well known today, but if Thoreau’s chilly tone in it seems surprising, it is because, in a curious way, “*Walden*” is not well known, either. Like many canonized works, it is more revered than read, so it exists for most people only as a dim impression retained from adolescence or as the source of a few famous lines: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately.” “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.” “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!”

Extracted from their contexts, such declarations read like the text on inspirational posters or quote-a-day calendars—purposes to which they are routinely put. Together with the bare facts of the retreat at *Walden*, those lines have become the ones by which we adumbrate Thoreau, so that our image of the man has also become simplified and inspirational. In that image, Thoreau is our national conscience: the voice in the American wilderness, urging us to be true to ourselves and to live in harmony with nature.

This vision cannot survive any serious reading of “*Walden*.” The real Thoreau was, in the fullest sense of the word, self-obsessed: narcissistic, fanatical about self-control, adamant that he required nothing beyond himself to understand and thrive in the world. From that inward fixation flowed a social and

*Why, given his hypocrisy, sanctimony, and misanthropy, has Thoreau been so cherished?*



political vision that is deeply unsettling. It is true that Thoreau was an excellent naturalist and an eloquent and prescient voice for the preservation of wild places. But "Walden" is less a cornerstone work of environmental literature than the original cabin porn: a fantasy about rustic life divorced from the reality of living in the woods, and, especially, a fantasy about escaping the entanglements and responsibilities of living among other people.

Henry David Thoreau was born David Henry Thoreau, in 1817, the third of four children of a pencil manufacturer in Concord, Massachusetts. In 1833, he went off to Harvard, which he did not particularly like and where he was not found particularly likable. (One classmate recalled his "look of smug satisfaction," like a man "preparing to hold his future views with great setness and personal appreciation of their importance.") After graduation, he worked as a schoolteacher, then helped run a school until its co-director, his older brother John, died of tetanus. That was the end of Thoreau's experiments in pedagogy, except perhaps on the page. On and off from then until his own death (at forty-four, of tuberculosis), he worked as a surveyor and in the family pencil factory.

Meanwhile, however, Thoreau had met Ralph Waldo Emerson, a fellow Concord resident fourteen years his senior. Intellectually as well as practically, Emerson's influence on Thoreau was enormous. He introduced the younger man to transcendentalism, steered him toward writing, employed him as a jack-of-all-trades and live-in tutor to his children, and lent him the pond-side land where Thoreau went to live on July 4, 1845. Thoreau spent two years at Walden but nearly ten years writing "Walden," which was published, in 1854, to middling critical and popular acclaim; it took five more years for the initial print run, of two thousand copies, to sell out. Only after Thoreau's death, in 1862, and thanks to vigorous championing by his family members, Emerson, and later readers, did "Walden" become a cornerstone work of American nonfiction and its author an American hero.

Thoreau went to Walden, he tells us, "to learn what are the gross necessities of life": whatever is so essential to survival "that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever

attempt to do without it." Put differently, he wanted to try what we would today call subsistence living, a condition attractive chiefly to those not obliged to endure it. It attracted Thoreau because he "wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life." Tucked into that sentence is a strange distinction; apparently, some of the things we experience while alive count as life while others do not. In "Walden," Thoreau made it his business to distinguish between them.

As it turns out, very little counted as life for Thoreau. Food, drink, friends, family, community, tradition, most work, most education, most conversation: all this he dismissed as outside the real business of living. Although Thoreau also found no place in life for organized religion, the criteria by which he drew such distinctions were, at base, religious. A dualist all the way down, he divided himself into soul and body, and never could accept the latter. "I love any other piece of nature, almost, better," he confided to his journal. The physical realities of being human appalled him. "The wonder is how they, how you and I, can live this slimy, beastly life, eating and drinking," he wrote in "Walden." Only by denying such appetites could he feel that he was tending adequately to his soul.

"Walden," in consequence, is not a paean to living simply; it is a paean to living *purely*, with all the moral judgment that the word implies. In its first chapter, "Economy," Thoreau lays out a program of abstinence so thoroughgoing as to make the Dalai Lama look like a Kardashians. (That chapter must be one of the highest barriers to entry in the Western canon: dry, sententious, condescending, more than eighty pages long.) Thoreau, who never wed, regarded "sensuality" as a dangerous contaminant, by which we "stain and pollute one another." He did not smoke and avoided eating meat. He shunned alcohol, although with scarcely more horror than he shunned every beverage except water: "Think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! Ah, how low I fall when I am tempted by them!" Such temptations, along with the dangerous intoxicant that is music, had, he felt, caused the fall of Greece and Rome.

I cannot idolize anyone who opposes coffee (especially if the objection is that it erodes great civilizations; had the man not heard of the Enlightenment?), but Thoreau never met an appetite too innocuous to denounce. He condemned those who gathered cranberries for jam ("So butchers rake the tongues of bison out of the prairie grass") and regarded salt as "that grossest of groceries"; if he did without it, he boasted, he could also drink less water. He advised his readers to eat just one meal a day, partly to avoid having to earn additional money for food but also because the act of eating bordered, for him, on an ethical transgression. "The fruits eaten temperately need not make us ashamed of our appetites," he wrote, as if our appetites were otherwise disgraceful. No slouch at public shaming, Thoreau did his part to sustain that irrational equation, so robust in America, between eating habits and moral worth.

Food was bad, drink was bad, even shelter was suspect, and Thoreau advised keeping it to a minimum. "I used to see a large box by the railroad," he wrote in "Walden," "six feet long by three wide, in which the laborers locked up their tools at night": drill a few airholes, he argued, and one of these would make a fine home. ("I am far from jesting," he added, unnecessarily. Thoreau regarded humor as he regarded salt, and did without.) He chose to live in a somewhat larger box at Walden, but austerity prevailed there, too. He eschewed curtains and recoiled in dismay from the idea of a doormat: "As I had no room to spare within the house, nor time to spare within or without to shake it, I declined it, preferring to wipe my feet on the sod before my door. It is best to avoid the beginnings of evil."

I am not aware of any theology which holds that the road to Hell is paved with doormats, but Thoreau, in fine Puritan fashion, saw the beginnings of evil everywhere. He contemplated gathering the wild herbs around Walden to sell in Concord but concluded that "I should probably be on my way to the devil." He permitted himself to plant beans, but cautiously, calling it "a rare amusement, which, continued too long, might have become a dissipation." Only those with no sense of balance must live in so much fear of the slippery slope. Robert Louis Stevenson, writing about Thoreau in 1880, pointed out that when a man must "abstain

from nearly everything that his neighbours innocently and pleasurably use, and from the rubs and trials of human society itself into the bargain, we recognise that valetudinarian healthfulness which is more delicate than sickness itself.”

To abstain, Stevenson understood, is not necessarily to simplify; restrictions and repudiations can just as easily complicate one’s life. (Try going out to dinner with a vegan who is avoiding gluten.) But worse than Thoreau’s radical self-denial is his denial of others. The most telling thing he purports to abstain from while at Walden is companionship, which he regards as at best a time-consuming annoyance, at worst a threat to his mortal soul. For Thoreau, in other words, his fellow-humans had the same moral status as doormats.

No feature of the natural landscape is more humble than a pond, but, on the evidence of Thoreau, the quality is not contagious. He despised his admirers, toward whom, Emerson wrote, he “was never affectionate, but superior, didactic,—scorning their petty ways.” He disdained his ostensible friends, once responding to a social invitation with the words “*such are my engagements to myself*, that I dare not promise.” (The italics are his.) And he looked down on his entire town. “What does our Concord culture amount to?” he asked in “Walden.” “Our reading, our conversation and thinking, are all on a very low level, worthy only of pygmies and manikins.”

This comprehensive arrogance is captured in one of Thoreau’s most famous lines: “The mass of men lead lives of

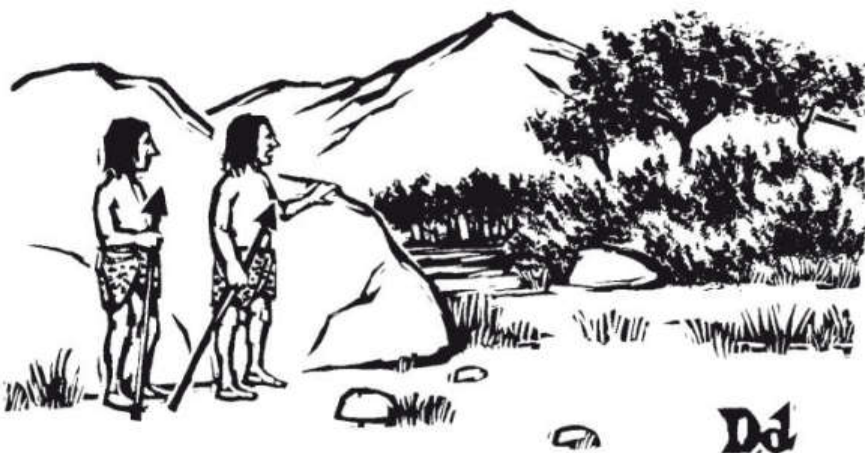
quiet desperation.” It is a mystery to me how a claim so simultaneously insufferable and absurd ever entered the canon of popular quotations. Had Thoreau broadened it to include himself, it would be less obnoxious; had he broadened it to include everyone (à la Sartre), it would be more defensible. As it stands, however, Thoreau’s declaration is at once off-putting and empirically dubious. By what method, one wonders, could a man so disinclined to get to know other people substantiate an allegation about the majority of humanity?

By none, of course; Thoreau could not have been less interested in how the mass of men actually lived. On the contrary, he was as parochial as he was egotistical. (He once claimed that Massachusetts contained almost all the important plants in America, and, after reading the explorer Elisha Kane’s best-selling 1856 account of his Arctic journey, remarked that “most of the phenomena noted might be observed in Concord.”) His attitude toward Europe “almost reached contempt,” Emerson wrote, while “the other side of the globe” was, in Thoreau’s words, “barbarous and unhealthy.” Making a virtue of his incuriosity, he discouraged the reading of newspapers. “I am sure,” he wrote in “Walden,” “that I never read any memorable news in a newspaper,” not least because “nothing new does ever happen in foreign parts.” In that sweeping claim, he explicitly included the French Revolution.

Unsurprisingly, this thoroughgoing misanthrope did not care to help other people. “I confess that I have hitherto indulged very little in philanthropic enterprises,” Thoreau wrote in “Walden.”

He had “tried it fairly” and was “satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution.” Nor did spontaneous generosity: “I require of a visitor that he be not actually starving, though he may have the very best appetite in the world, however he got it. Objects of charity are not guests.” In what is by now a grand American tradition, Thoreau justified his own parsimony by impugning the needy. “Often the poor man is not so cold and hungry as he is dirty and ragged and gross. It is partly his taste, and not merely his misfortune. If you give him money, he will perhaps buy more rags with it.” Thinking of that state of affairs, Thoreau writes, “I began to pity myself, and I saw that it would be a greater charity to bestow on me a flannel shirt than a whole slop-shop on him.”

The poor, the rich, his neighbors, his admirers, strangers: Thoreau’s antipathy toward humanity even encompassed the very idea of civilization. In his journals, he laments the archeological wealth of Great Britain and gives thanks that in New England “we have not to lay the foundation of our houses in the ashes of a former civilization.” That is patently untrue, but it is also telling: for Thoreau, civilization was a contaminant. “Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries,” he wrote in “Walden.” “The soil is blanched and accursed there.” Seen by these lights, Thoreau’s retreat at Walden was a desperate compromise. What he really wanted was to be Adam, before Eve—to be the first human, unsullied, utterly alone in his Eden.



*“If you tasted like umami, where would you be hiding?”*

There is a striking exception to Thoreau’s indifference to the rest of humanity, and he is rightly famous for it. An outspoken abolitionist, he condemned the Fugitive Slave Law, served as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, championed John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, and refused to pay the poll tax in Massachusetts, partly on the ground that it sustained the institution of slavery. (One wonders how he would have learned about the law, the raid, or any of the rest without a newspaper, but never mind.) That institution was and remains the central moral and political crisis of American history, and much of Thoreau’s status



stems from his absolute opposition to it.

But one may reach good ends by bad means, and Thoreau did. "Not a particle of respect had he to the opinions of any man or body of men, but homage solely to the truth itself," Emerson wrote of Thoreau. He meant it as praise, but the trouble with that position—and the deepest of all the troubles disturbing the waters of "Walden"—is that it assumes that Thoreau had some better way of discerning the truth than other people did.

Thoreau, for one, did assume that. Like his fellow-transcendentalists, he was suspicious of tradition and institutions, and regarded personal intuition and direct revelation as superior foundations for both spiritual and secular beliefs. Unlike his fellow-transcendentalists, he also regarded his own particular intuitions and revelations as superior to those of other people. "Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men," he wrote in "Walden," "it seems as if I were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded."

Claiming special guidance by the gods is the posture of the prophet: of one who believes himself in possession of revealed truth and therefore entitled—indeed, obliged—to enlighten others. Thoreau, comfortable with that posture, sneered at those who were not. ("They don't want to have any prophets born into their families—damn them!") But prophecy makes for poor political philosophy, for at least two reasons.

The first concerns the problem of fallibility. In "Resistance to Civil Government" (better known today as "Civil Disobedience"), Thoreau argued that his only political obligation was "to do at any time what I think right." When constrained by its context, that line is compelling; it reads as a call to obey one's conscience over and above unjust laws. But as a broader theory of governance, which it was, it is troubling. People routinely perpetrate wrongs out of obedience to their conscience, even in situations when the law mandates better behavior. (Consider the Kentucky county clerk currently refusing to issue marriage licenses to gay couples.) Like public institutions, private moral compasses can err, and different ones frequently point

in different directions. And, as the scholar Vincent Buranelli noted in a 1957 critique of Thoreau, "antagonism is never worse than when it involves two men each of whom is convinced that he speaks for goodness and rectitude." It is the point of democracy to adjudicate among such conflicting claims through some means other than fiat or force, but Thoreau was not interested in that process.

Nor was he interested in subjecting his claims to logical scrutiny. And that is



the second problem with basing one's beliefs on personal intuition and direct revelation: it justifies the substitution of anecdote and authority for evidence and reason. The result, in "Walden," is an unnavigable thicket of contradiction and caprice. At one moment, Thoreau fulminates against the railroad, "that devilish Iron Horse, whose ear-rending neigh is heard throughout the town"; in the next, he claims that he is "refreshed and expanded when the freight train rattles past me." At one moment, he argues that earlier civilizations are worthless; in the next, he combines a kids-today crankiness with nostalgia for the imagined superiority of the past. ("Husbandry was once a sacred art; but it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us.") On the subject of employment, "Walden" reads sometimes like "The 4-Hour Workweek" and sometimes like the collected sermons of John Calvin. Thoreau denigrates labor, praises leisure, and claims that he can earn his living for the month in a matter of days, only to turn around and write that "from exertion come wisdom and purity; from sloth ignorance and sensuality." So incoherent is his treatment of economics that E. B. White, otherwise a fan, wrote that Thoreau "rides into the subject at top speed, shooting in all directions." No one and nothing emerges unscathed, least of all the author.

Emerson famously counselled against maintaining a foolish consistency, but Thoreau managed to get it wrong in both

directions. His behavioral prescriptions are so foolishly inconsistent as to defy all attempts at reconciliation, while his moral sensibility is so foolishly consistent as to be naïve and cruel. (For one thing, Thoreau never understood that life itself is not consistent—that what worked for a well-off Harvard-educated man without dependents or obligations might not make an ideal universal code.) Those failings are ethical and intellectual, but they are also political. To reject all certainties but one's own is the behavior of a zealot; to issue contradictory decrees based on private whim is that of a despot.

This is not the stuff of a democratic hero. Nor were Thoreau's actual politics, which were libertarian verging on anarchist. Like today's preppers, he valued self-sufficiency for reasons that were simultaneously self-aggrandizing and suspicious: he did not believe that he needed anything from other people, and he did not trust other people to provide it. "That government is best which governs least," Jefferson supposedly said. Thoreau, revising him, wrote, "That government is best which governs not at all."

Yet for a man who believed in governance solely by conscience, his own was frighteningly narrow. Thoreau had no understanding whatsoever of poverty and consistently romanticized it. ("Farmers are respectable and interesting to me in proportion as they are poor.") His moral clarity about abolition stemmed less from compassion or a commitment to equality than from the fact that slavery so blatantly violated his belief in self-governance. Indeed, when abolition was pitted against rugged individualism, the latter proved his higher priority. "I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous, I may almost say," he writes in "Walden," "as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself."

A nation composed entirely of rugged individualists—so stinting that they had almost no needs, so solitary that those needs never conflicted with those of their compatriots—would not, it is true, need much governance. But such a nation has never existed, and even if

nothing else militated against Thoreau's political vision its impossibility alone would suffice. As the philosopher Avishai Margalit once put it (not apropos of Thoreau, though apropos of the similarly unachievable position of absolute stoicism), "I consider not being an option as being, in a way, enough of an argument." So perhaps a sufficient argument against Thoreau is that, although he never admitted it, the life he prescribed was not an option even for him.

Only by elastic measures can "Walden" be regarded as nonfiction. Read charitably, it is a kind of semi-fictional extended meditation featuring a character named Henry David Thoreau. Read less charitably, it is akin to those recent best-selling memoirs whose authors turn out to have fabricated large portions of their stories. It is widely acknowledged that, to craft a tidier narrative, Thoreau condensed his twenty-six months at the cabin into a single calendar year. But that is the least of the liberties he takes with the facts, and the most forgivable of his manipulations of our experience as readers. The book is subtitled "Life in the Woods," and, from those words onward, Thoreau insists that we read it as the story of a voluntary exile from society, an extended confrontation with wilderness and solitude.

In reality, Walden Pond in 1845 was scarcely more off the grid, relative to contemporaneous society, than Prospect Park is today. The commuter train to Boston ran along its southwest side; in summer the place swarmed with picnickers and swimmers, while in winter it was frequented by ice cutters and skaters. Thoreau could stroll from his cabin to his family home, in Concord, in twenty minutes, about as long as it takes to walk the fifteen blocks from Carnegie Hall to Grand Central Terminal. He made that walk several times a week, lured by his mother's cookies or the chance to dine with friends. These facts he glosses over in "Walden," despite detailing with otherwise skinflint precision his eating habits and expenditures. He also fails to mention weekly visits from his mother and sisters (who brought along more undocumented food) and downplays the fact that he routinely hosted other guests as well—sometimes as many as thirty at a time. This is the situation Thoreau summed up

by saying, "For the most part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as much Asia or Africa as New England. . . . At night there was never a traveller passed my house, or knocked at my door, more than if I were the first or last man."

Does this disingenuousness matter? Countless Thoreau fans have argued that it does not, quoting by way of defense his own claim that "solitude is not measured by the miles of space that intervene between a man and his fellows." But, as the science writer David Quammen pointed out in a 1988 essay on Thoreau (before going on to pardon him), many kinds of solitude *are* measured in miles. Only someone who had never experienced true remoteness could mistake Walden for the wilderness or compare life on the bustling pond to that on the mid-nineteenth-century prairies. Indeed, an excellent corrective to "Walden" is the work of Laura Ingalls Wilder, who grew up on those prairies, and in a genuine little house in the big woods. Wilder lived what Thoreau merely played at, and her books are not only more joyful and interesting than "Walden" but also, when reread, a thousand times more harrowing. Real isolation presents real risks, both emotional and mortal, and, had Thoreau truly lived at a remove from other people, he might have valued them more. Instead, his case against community rested on an ersatz experience of doing without it.

Begin with false premises and you risk reaching false conclusions. Begin with falsified premises and you forfeit your authority. Apologists for Thoreau often claim that he merely distorted some trivial facts in the service of a deeper truth. But how deep can a truth be—indeed, how true can it be—if it is not built from facts? Thoreau contends that he went to Walden to construct a life on the basis of ethical and existential first principles, and that what he achieved as a result was simple and worth emulating. (His claim that he doesn't want others to imitate him can't be taken seriously. For one thing, "Walden" is a guide to doing just that, down to the number of chairs a man should own. For another, having dismissed all other life styles as morally and spiritually desperate, he doesn't leave his readers much choice.)

But Thoreau did not live as he described, and no ethical principle is emp-

tier than one that does not apply to its author. The hypocrisy is not that Thoreau aspired to solitude and self-sufficiency but kept going home for cookies and company. That's just the gap between aspiration and execution, plus the variability in our needs and moods from one moment to the next—eminently human experiences, which, had Thoreau engaged with them, would have made for a far more interesting and useful book. The hypocrisy is that Thoreau lived a complicated life but pretended to live a simple one. Worse, he preached at others to live as he did not, while berating them for their own compromises and complexities.

Why, given Thoreau's hypocrisy, his sanctimony, his dour asceticism, and his scorn, do we continue to cherish "Walden"? One answer is that we read him early. "Walden" is a staple of the high-school curriculum, and you could scarcely write a book more appealing to teenagers: Thoreau endorses rebellion against societal norms, champions idleness over work, and gives his readers permission to ignore their elders. ("Practically, the old have no very important advice to give the young, their own experience has been so partial, and their lives have been such miserable failures.") "Walden" is also fundamentally adolescent in tone: Thoreau shares the conviction, far more developmentally appropriate and forgivable in teens, that everyone else's certainties are wrong while one's own are unassailable. Moreover, he presents adulthood not as it is but as kids wishfully imagine it: an idyll of autonomy, unfettered by any civic or familial responsibilities.

Another reason we cherish "Walden" is that we read it selectively. Although Thoreau is insufferable when fancying himself a seer, he is wonderful at actually seeing, and the passages he devotes to describing the natural world have an acuity and serenity that nothing else in the book approaches. It is a pleasure to read him on a battle between black and red ants; on the layers of ice that form as the pond freezes over in winter; on the breeze, birds, fish, waterbugs, and dust motes that differently disturb the surface of Walden. At one point, out in his boat, Thoreau paddles after a loon when it submerges, to try to be nearby when it resurfaces. "It was a pretty game, played on the smooth surface of the pond,



## POKER

You're told this deck was found  
in some shattered bothy or croft  
north of the Great Glen,  
missing its six of diamonds,  
shuffled and dealt to a soft  
pliancy, greased with lanolin

and you're told this deck lived behind  
the bar in a barracks town  
and came out to play most nights,  
cut between the Falklands  
and Iraq, its spring long gone,  
dark-edged with mammal sweat

and you're told this deck is the one  
recovered from a halfway house  
where fatty stalactites  
grew in a microwave oven,  
where a bottle of Famous Grouse  
was brandished in a fight

and it might be a pack of lies  
or it might be a sleight of hand,  
and you can't tell which is a bluff  
because words are a good disguise  
for holding nothing. I've found  
that nothing is more than enough.

—Paul Farley

a man against a loon," he writes. "Suddenly your adversary's checker disappears beneath the board, and the problem is to place yours nearest to where his will appear again." That is first-rate nature writing. Thoreau, too, emerges in a surprising place—in a game of checkers, where a lesser writer would have reached for hide-and-seek—and captures not only the behavior of the loon but a very human pleasure in being outdoors.

It is also in contemplating the land that Thoreau got the big picture right. "We can never have enough of nature," he wrote. "We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander." However sham his own retreat was, however pinched and selfish his motives in undertaking it, he understood why the wilderness matters, and he was right that there is something salutary, liberating, and exhilarating about living in it with as little as necessary.

But any reading of Thoreau that casts him as a champion of nature is guilty of cherry-picking his most admirable work while turning a blind eye on all the rest. The other and more damning answer to the question of why we admire him is not that we read him incompletely and inaccurately but that we read him exactly right. Although Thoreau is often regarded as a kind of cross between Emerson, John Muir, and William Lloyd Garrison, the man who emerges in "Walden" is far closer in spirit to Ayn Rand: suspicious of government, fanatical about individualism, egotistical, elitist, convinced that other people lead pathetic lives yet categorically opposed to helping them. It is not despite but because of these qualities that Thoreau makes such a convenient national hero.

Perhaps the strangest, saddest thing about "Walden" is that it is a book about how to live that says next to nothing about how to live with other people. Soc-

rates, too, examined his life—in the middle of the agora. Montaigne obsessed over himself down to the corns on his toes, but he did so with camaraderie and mirth. Whitman, Thoreau's contemporary and fellow-transcendentalist, joined him in singing a song of himself, striving to be untamed, encouraging us to resist much and obey little. But he was generous ("Give alms to everyone that asks"), empathetic ("Whoever degrades another degrades me"), and comfortable with multitudes, his and otherwise. He would have responded to a shipwreck as he did to the Civil War, tending the wounded and sitting with the grieving and the dying.

Poor Thoreau. He, too, was the victim of a kind of shipwreck—for reasons of his own psychology, a castaway from the rest of humanity. Ultimately, it is impossible not to feel sorry for the author of "Walden," who dedicated himself to establishing the bare necessities of life without ever realizing that the necessary is a low, dull bar; whose account of how to live reads less like an existential reckoning than like a poor man's budget, with its calculations of how much to eat and sleep crowding out questions of why we are here and how we should treat one another; who lived alongside a pond, chronicled a trip down the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, and wrote about Cape Cod, all without recognizing that it is on watering holes and rivers and coastlines that human societies are built.

Granted, it is sometimes difficult to deal with society. Few things will thwart your plans to live deliberately faster than those messy, confounding surprises known as other people. Likewise, few things will thwart your absolute autonomy faster than governance, and not only when the government is unjust; every law is a parameter, a constraint on what we might otherwise do. Teen-agers, too, strain and squirm against any checks on their liberty. But the mature position, and the one at the heart of the American democracy, seeks a balance between the individual and the society. Thoreau lived out that complicated balance; the pity is that he forsook it, together with all fellow-feeling, in "Walden." And yet we made a classic of the book, and a moral paragon of its author—a man whose deepest desire and signature act was to turn his back on the rest of us. ♦

# ROAD WARRIOR

*After fifty years, Gloria Steinem is still at the forefront of the feminist cause.*

BY JANE KRAMER

One day in the fall of 1997, Gloria Steinem was unpacking a carry-on bag that in the course of a few weeks had seen the inside of more airplane overhead bins than most travellers' do in a year, and, as she tells the story, that was when she knew it was time to write a book about her life on the road, rallying women to the fight for equal rights. Steinem was sixty-three then. She had been travelling for more than thirty years, speaking, advising, fundraising, organizing, testifying, demonstrating, educating, campaigning, and, in the process, introducing millions of girls and women to the feminist cause—and during that time she had also founded and presided over the magazine *Ms.*, written books, published and edited collections, and, through the Ms. Foundation, which she and three friends of the magazine established, nurtured the talent of generations of younger feminists. But she had never stopped travelling, and she wasn't about to now, with a road book planned. "I've spent more time on the road than not," she told me this past summer. "It's been the most important part of my life—and a big antidote to the idea that there is 'one' American people."

Steinem finished the book in February this year, or, as she puts it, "seventeen deadlines late," and in March she celebrated her eighty-first birthday, with a small dinner cooked by a group of friends. "A relief!" she told me. "My eightieth birthday had gone on for a year. People were starting to think that the movement began with me and, worse, was going to end with me." It wasn't the first time this had happened. Steinem's decennials, marked by her enduringly beautiful face, have been a source of fascination (and huge spikes in feminist fund-raising) since she turned forty and a clueless reporter remarked, by way of a

compliment, "Oh, you don't look forty"—to which she replied, "This is what forty looks like. We've been lying for so long, who would know?" Every ten years since then, that face, with its iconic curtain of long, straight hair falling from a center part, begins to appear on magazine covers, television screens, dorm posters, and even T-shirts: this is what fifty looks like, what sixty looks like, this is seventy. Her eightieth-birthday marathon kicked off with a benefit in Philadelphia, and, while she spent her actual birthday on an elephant in Botswana, she spent the rest of the year "using myself" to promote the cause and the work of other feminists—and to finally finish her book. "I was out of excuses," she told me. "Embarrassing!"

Toward the end of May, Steinem, her galleys corrected and delivered, boarded a plane to Beijing, where thirty-one peace activists—among them two Nobel laureates—from thirteen countries were gathering to fly to North Korea on a peace mission. Their intention, as Steinem explained it, was to cross the DMZ into South Korea, "standing in" for the Korean women on both sides of a longitudinal line they had been forbidden to cross since the war there ended, in 1953. "We were hoping to walk the entire DMZ, because we were all in white, wearing peace scarves," she said. "But they put us on a bus instead. While we were still in Beijing, a friend called and asked what I was doing. I said, 'I'm being a parody of myself.' True. But I learned an enormous amount—most of all, that those years of isolation and hostility didn't work. North Korea is the most controlling place I've ever been. The day we crossed the DMZ was the longest day of my life. In every way."

Twelve days later, Steinem was in

Vermont, giving the commencement address at Bennington College, and on her way home she e-mailed to say that she was ready for conversation. "I've got a slow few weeks—plenty of time to talk," she said when I joined her that afternoon, in the garden of the Upper East Side brownstone where she has lived since the late sixties, when she was a rent-controlled tenant, and now owns the first two floors. "Well, slow for me," she added, given that in a few days she would be flying to Alaska to speak to an audience of three thousand at the University of Alaska's Fairbanks campus.

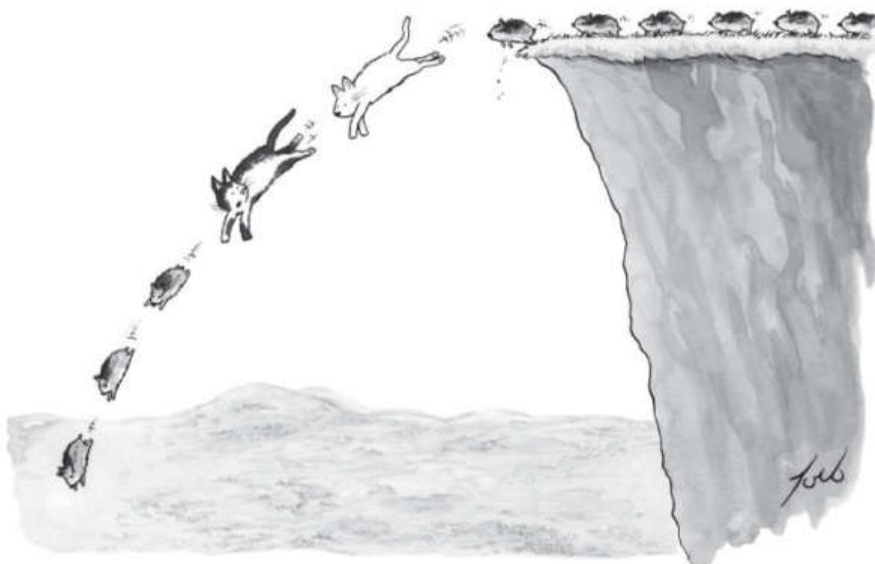
She had leaped at the invitation. Alaska was the one state she had never visited, and college campuses, she said, had always been "the single largest slice of my travelling pie"—laboratories of social activism and, in the end, social change. Typically, her schedule was packed. Among other things, she would be paying a visit to the city's "victim-services shelter," the Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living, where more than half the residents were Native Alaskan women from isolated settlements, many with their children. She would also be lunching with ten well-heeled white women, who had bid to join her for an "intimate" Fabulous Feminist Fundraiser. And she would be arguing the case for choice at a big Fairbanks co-operative that was under attack from a conservative borough assemblyman for condoning murder by stocking an issue of *Ms.* with an article about abortion.

"The best part was the shelter, listening to those amazing women," Steinem told me when she got home. "For them—women in trouble, in need, terrified, beaten, suicidal women, women with kids at risk—the question is where do you go when you've got no way to go, no roads, no cars, no way out. The violence rate in Alaska





*"I'm an entrepreneur of social change," Steinem says. "I talk. I write. I tell stories. I want to do justice to the women I meet."*



*"There's nothing worse than waiting in the wrong line."*

is high, and at first the shelter was secret. Now there's always a state trooper on guard."

I asked Steinem what she thought she could do for those women, and she said, "I'm a media worker, in the parlance of the nineteen-thirties. It's what I do. I'm an entrepreneur of social change. I raise money. I talk. I write. I tell stories. I want to do justice to the women I meet, to tell their stories. There was one young woman who asked me, 'How do you stand up for yourself when you have no right to stand up for yourself?' No one had ever told her that she had that right. The first time she tried, her husband had said no, she had no rights. I want to reach women like her."

Steinem is not a theorist, or even much interested in theory. "Feminist theory came from feminist activism—it wasn't the other way around," she said. "I accept that important theorists like Judith Butler may arrive at enlightening conclusions, but theory can be exclusionary, and that's not my path. My path is to open the door to this house, to get out of the world I know, and to experience new worlds, new voices. It's making connections, and using myself to listen, because you can't empower women without listening to *their* stories. It's why I was going to call my book 'America—As If Everyone Matters.' I

liked that title—the irony in it—but I changed my mind after three black women founded the group Black Lives Matter. I didn't want to detract from that powerful name or to suggest in any way that my 'irony' was a comment on it. Somebody at the publisher's suggested 'Memoir.' I thought, That's such an elite word. Wrong! Finally, we settled on 'My Life on the Road.' " (Steinem, who doesn't drive, says, "Well, not quite 'on,' more like 'above.'") It comes out this month.

Steinem has a mantra that she says she lives by. She calls it "Ask the Turtle," because it involves a turtle she rescued—or thought she had—on a geology-class field trip to the Connecticut River Valley in the spring of her freshman year at Smith. "I found a mud turtle on the riverbank, up by the asphalt road," she told me. "A big snapping turtle, more than a foot long, but I picked it up—carefully—and lugged it down to the river and slipped it in. The professor saw me just as the turtle disappeared in the water. He said that the turtle had been making its way to dry land for a reason—in order to lay its eggs—and that now it was going to take that turtle months more to lay them. It was a lesson I learned to apply to people a few years later, in India—though I didn't realize it then—when I was going from village to village with

Gandhian women organizers, listening to them ask, 'Tell us your stories. You've lived them, you're the experts.'"

Steinem comes from Toledo, Ohio, which, as she said one night, standing in her kitchen scrutinizing take-out menus, explains why she won't eat sushi or rare meat, "like New Yorkers do." She doesn't blame Toledo, although her loyalty was seriously tested when the city presented her with a "Son of Ohio" plaque. But the road itself was something her father, Leo Steinem, taught her. Leo was the black-sheep son of a German-Jewish Toledo family—his father was a businessman and his mother a prominent local suffragist, the first woman to be elected to the Toledo Board of Education—which is to say that he was not enchanted by his parents' comfortably progressive bourgeois Toledo life.

"He was the real gypsy, not me," Steinem said. "He was kind, loving, funny, but never in one place for long, which meant that we weren't, either." The longest times were summers in southern Michigan, where he had bought farmland. He built a small resort on it, with a lakeside dance pavilion, and booked the bands that were playing the summer circuit. But as soon as the season ended he would pack his wife, Ruth, and their two girls (Steinem's sister was nine years older) into a trailer. For the rest of the year, the family moved slowly south, with Leo stopping in every town they passed, buying and selling and trading antiques, a peripatetic dealer. Steinem's first full year of school anywhere was "maybe the seventh grade," but by then she was reading a book a day—"Librarians saved my life," she says—and had witnessed her parents' mournful separation.

It had been years in coming. When Steinem was born, her mother—the daughter of working-class Protestant parents and, when she met Leo, a successful young journalist—had already suffered one severe breakdown and spent nearly two years in a sanitarium. By the time they divorced, Ruth was addicted to sodium pentothal—"the same drug they fed to Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath," Steinem says—and Leo was living out of a car in California, visiting once a year.

Steinem, who lived alone with her



mother from the age of ten until she left for college, says that, as a girl, she used to think that her mother was crazy. "It was only much later, when I began to understand how unjust the position of women was in this country, that I knew my mother had never been 'ill,' as the doctors claimed. It was that her spirit had been broken. Until then, I had always worried that I might have inherited something—that I'd start disappearing into the street in my nightgown, the way she had."

It isn't surprising that Steinem had what she calls "a Hollywood vision of school." She dreamed of becoming a dancer and maybe, eventually, a Rockette. "I imagined myself, with some impracticality, as dancing my way out of Toledo," she told me. By the time she started high school, she had mastered tap dancing while twirling a baton, as well as dancing down a flight of stairs, like a Busby Berkeley showgirl, playing "Anchors Aweigh" on ankle bells. And though she balked at "sinking so low as to put taps on toe shoes"—in late-forties Toledo, the ultimate female talent test—dancing remains on her list of life's fulfilling pleasures (along with organizing and great sex). She has been spotted dancing in elevators and office corridors, and even, for a few months in the nineteen-nineties, at the old Roseland Ballroom, taking tango lessons. "It's a sick, authoritarian dance, but I loved it," she says.

I once asked Steinem what the real-estate developer and publisher Mort Zuckerman—a man I had seen, years earlier, signalling her to light his cigar—was doing on her otherwise egalitarian list of former lovers, which includes, most enduringly, Franklin Thomas, who for seventeen years was the head of the Ford Foundation ("the longtime love of my life, and best friend"), along with the great alto saxophonist and composer of "Take Five," Paul Desmond ("a close friend and a short romance"), the director Mike Nichols ("more like three or four years of a smart date"), the Ford Administration's Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Stan Pottinger ("We'd been together long enough, so we stopped the affair"), and the Olympic decathlete and actor Rafer Johnson, who helped tackle Sirhan Sirhan, moments after he shot Bobby Kennedy ("I have lasting respect for him").

She replied, "Well, Mort's moved to the right now, but he was funny, and he *loved* to dance."

"My father gave new meaning to the term 'financially irresponsible,' and after years of it my mom crashed," Steinem told the actress and director Christine Lahti one night this summer. Lahti was debating putting together a theatre piece based on stories about the women in her own family, and the two friends went out to dinner and traded reminiscences about "the un-lived lives of our moms." Once, when Steinem was visiting, her mother told her, "Your sister just got a fur coat and didn't have to pay for it"—meaning that her sister was married and Steinem, who was not, had to buy her own coats. "My mother wasn't criticizing me—she was *advising* me," Steinem told Lahti, laughing.

The women talked for a long time about the kind of liberation that comes from laughing—Steinem having watched six female comics perform at the Gotham Comedy Club the night before. The show was called Sisters of Comedy, and the impresario was the young feminist producer and writer Agunda Okeyo, who, at the time, was staying in Steinem's guest room. "The power of laughter—that's power!" she said. "It's our only free emotion, the one that nobody can control."

"One of the hard things for me, starting out as an actress, was to laugh," Lahti said. "To find a visual memory or image that let me laugh." Today, it might be the look on her father's face—he was a surgeon, partial to the ubiquitous male adage of his generation "Why buy the whole cow if you can get the milk free?"—if, as a teen-age girl, she had come back with the feminist retort "Why buy the whole pig just to get one little sausage?"

Lahti married in her thirties and has three children. Steinem married for the first time in her mid-sixties, inherited three stepchildren (among them the actor Christian Bale), and was widowed three years later, when her husband, David Bale, died of brain cancer, at the age of sixty-two. Bale was a South African-born British businessman and environmentalist. They met when he walked up to her at a Los

Angeles Voters for Choice benefit. It was a happy marriage, "a green-card marriage, because we would have been together anyway," Steinem told me. She says that caring for him that last year, when he was ill and "needed someone to help him out of life, and I needed someone to force me to live in the present," had actually helped her "expiate the pain of my old terrors"—the terrors of caring for her mother when she was too young to understand or cope.

Steinem has compared marriage to slavery law in this country. As a young woman, she fled one brief, ill-advised engagement. And, in her early forties, she amiably dissolved a second, to Robert Benton, who went on to write and direct "Kramer vs. Kramer." "Neither of us was really sure we wanted to marry, so we took it in steps. The first was to do the blood tests and get the license. We did. The second was for him to buy the new suit. He did. The third was for me to buy the dress. I never got to the dress, I just couldn't do it, and the marriage license expired."

Four years after David Bale died, a reporter from Pakistan asked Steinem why she had changed her mind about marriage. "I didn't change," she told him. "Marriage changed. We spent thirty years in the United States changing the marriage laws. If I had married when I was supposed to get married, I would have lost my name, my legal residence, my credit rating, many of my civil rights. That's not true anymore. It's possible to make an equal marriage."

Steinem's archives are at Smith. She is devoted to the college, which was founded, in the eighteen-seventies, with an endowment from Sophia Smith, a Massachusetts woman with a family fortune at her disposal and a strong desire to provide young women with what she described in her will as the "means and facilities" for higher education equal to any available to young men. In Steinem's senior year, Chester Bowles, who would shortly be named Ambassador to India, came to speak. He was so taken by the students' response that he donated his lecture fee of two thousand dollars—serious money, in those days, when a year's room, board, and tuition at Smith

cost about half that—to help finance a year in India for two seniors after graduation. Steinem got one of the fellowships.

“The first organizing I did was in India, though I didn’t realize it then, only that I wanted to stay,” she told me. She stayed two years, having talked the press office at Pan Am into free tickets with the promise of “writing something that would make people want to fly to India. I had figured out how to do that. My writing was what I’d depended on to get through exams. I’d make up a great quote and attribute it to an important thinker. The professor would be impressed.”

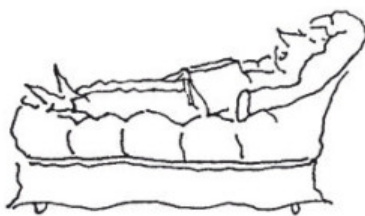
Steinem’s oldest friend from India, the feminist organizer and economist Devaki Jain, flew to New York this summer to spend a couple of weeks in Steinem’s guest room, going over the manuscript of an autobiography that Steinem had been urging her to write. They had met in Delhi at the beginning of 1957, when Jain, just home on a break from Oxford, was doing research for a Gandhian co-operative union. “We became friends so fast, and with such ease, and we had a wonderful time,” Jain told me. “But Gloria was already inspired. Like Gandhi, she walked the road. She had the humility to do that. It was what she wanted.”

Jain, who was one of the first women in India to use the word “feminist,” lost touch with Steinem after she went home. In 1974, they reconnected in New York, and a few years later Jain arranged for Steinem to return to India. It was on that trip, Steinem told me—“and only after the great conflagration of feminist consciousness in America”—that she understood how much those first two years had shaped her.

For one thing, she had quickly learned to eschew the car-with-driver distance preserved by many Westerners in India then, and, instead, to embrace the “dormitory on wheels” of rickety buses and the third-class women-only carriages of local trains—“leaving behind all my possessions except a cup, a comb, and the sari I had on” and discovering groups of women of all ages, sharing food and stories with other women they had just met. She had trekked to villages cordoned off by the government because of caste riots,

and watched, at night, as the villagers emerged from mud huts to sit in circles, lit by kerosene lamps, and tell their stories of burnings, murders, thefts, and rapes, “with fear and trauma that needed no translation” but with the relief that came from talking and being heard. In her road book, she calls it “the first time I witnessed the ancient and modern magic of talking circles, those groups in which anyone may speak in turn, everyone must listen, and consensus is more important than time.”

When Steinem returned from India, she started making the rounds of magazines and newspapers in New York, looking for a reporting job. It was not an experience that she would recommend. In those days, the news side of the business was a men’s club, and its prerogatives were rarely challenged. “We need a reporter, not a pretty girl” is how she remembers being shown the door by an editor at *Life*. She made her way freelancing. Her work from those days was direct, accessible, and often very funny, and in 1963 an editor at the magazine *Show* turned her loose on the Playboy Club. She went undercover as “Marie Catherine Ochs”—her grandmother’s name—applied to become a Playboy Bunny, got the job, and began her investigation into a world of puerile male fantasy, keeping a journal in which she recorded in deadpan detail her eleven



days of Bunny life, from the physical exam and the pushup, waist-crunching costume to the sleazy, oblivious men who would tweak her cottontail whenever she passed their table with a tray of drinks. The piece she produced made her famous.

“The rest of the Playboy story has two parts,” she told me. “First came the ‘looks’ attacks. I was accused of being noticed because of my ‘beauty.’ Well, let me tell you something from

the bottom of my soul. When I was young, in high school, in college, I was considered a pretty girl. But beautiful? I wasn’t considered beautiful until the women’s movement.” She laughed and said, “The threshold was lower then!” The second part was that most of the attacks came from men—furious that an undercover Bunny had invaded a male playground, and that people were reading what she wrote and, worse, laughing at them. (“Men fear ridicule the way women fear violence,” she says.) If those men thought of feminism at all, it was as a historic blip that began and ended with the “suffragettes”—who in fact campaigned and crusaded for eighty-some years before American women won voting rights, in 1920.

The struggle for women’s suffrage is known today in the movement as “first wave” feminism, though it’s unlikely that the kind of man who, nearly fifty years ago, paid for the privilege of tweaking cottontails at a Playboy Club had ever heard the term, let alone knew that a second wave was on the way. Not even Steinem knew that at the time. What she knew was that there was something wrong in those waning days of America’s postwar suburban idyll, in which happily entitled men rushed home from work on their commuter trains to wives who greeted them at the door, holding out a perfectly calibrated Martini. In those days, feminism was best known as the refuge and revenge of ugly women—women who couldn’t find a man to marry them.

I asked Steinem how she had dealt with the attacks, and she allowed that, at first, it wasn’t easy. “Other women in the movement helped me enormously, but there was one old woman in particular. I was giving a talk and the ‘looks’ thing came up. Before I could answer, she stood up and said, ‘It’s important for someone who could play the game, and win, to say, The game isn’t worth shit!’ I was so grateful to her for understanding that I could use who *I* was to say who *we* were and what we represent.”

By then, of course, the feminist movement was undeniably resurgent. The National Organization for Women dates from 1966. La Raza Unida, one of the first political parties with a feminist agenda, was founded by



Mexican-Americans in 1970. Black women's groups had long been active, particularly in the South, fighting the double discrimination of race and gender; women artists' and women writers' collectives were springing up in California, demanding a place in museums and on publishers' lists; and, in the big cities of the East, students and young working women were meeting in dorms and walkups for consciousness-raising sessions, talking about their lives and trying to figure out how to change them. Steinem was savvy enough to understand that the thorny gift of brains and beauty had made her attractive to the mass media and an unexpectedly useful servant of the cause.

In England, en route to India at the beginning of 1957, Steinem discovered that she was pregnant by her erstwhile fiancé. She ended the pregnancy when a doctor, at considerable risk to himself, referred her for an abortion, in a country where, as in the United States, abortions were still illegal when the life of the mother was not at stake. The doctor, knowing only that she “had broken an engagement at home to seek an unknown fate,” exacted two promises from Steinem: “First, you will not tell anyone my name. Second, you will do what you want to do with your life.” For nearly ten years, nobody, not even her closest friends, knew that she had had an abortion.

In 1968, Clay Felker, the former features editor of *Esquire*, founded *New York* and invited Steinem to join his editorial board. “There was Clay, Pete Hamill, Jimmy Breslin, Tom Wolfe, a few other guys, and me,” she said. She covered one of her first political campaigns that year, when Bobby Kennedy was running for senator in New York (an experience she still sums up as sharing a taxi with Gay Talese and Saul Bellow, to whom Talese said, “You know how every year there’s a pretty girl who comes to New York and pretends to be a writer. Well, Gloria is this year’s pretty girl”).

“I was doing politics, but even at the magazine I was still the girl writer,” she said, “and the guys there, whom I loved, their advice about feminism was, ‘Don’t get involved with those crazy women.’ I thought, These guys are my



*“Boy, when you need someone to say goodbye to his family forever so that you can fake your own death and assume his identity to escape from Chechen mobsters—that’s when you find out who your real friends are!”*

friends, and they don’t know who I am, because I haven’t said. So I covered an abortion-rights speak-out at Judson Memorial Church, in Greenwich Village. Courtesy of that meeting, I learned that one in three American women had needed an abortion at some point in her life. The question was: Why is this illegal? I could see from my response to the meeting, and the response of the others, that we as women needed to talk about ourselves.” The article that Steinem wrote that week counts among the first mainstream reporting on the women’s movement.

There are certain “mothers” of second-wave feminism, and who they are depends largely on whom you ask. If you ask an academic, she might say Simone de Beauvoir, whose book “*The Second Sex*” was published in French in 1949 (and in English four years later). If you ask a middle-class suburban housewife of the postwar generation, she is likely to credit Betty Friedan, whose “*The Feminine Mystique*” appeared in 1963. But if you ask American feminists who came of age in the

seventies they will as often as not tell you that the movement came to political life when Gloria Steinem first said, “If it’s not good for all women, it’s not good for any living thing.”

Beauvoir brought a philosophical and biological history of “female” to the table, lived and travelled with the philandering Jean-Paul Sartre, and was not much given to the cause or company of other women. Friedan brought the career ambitions of white, well-to-do women like her, craved the spotlight, and eventually was written off by much of the movement as a “glass-ceiling feminist.” But what Steinem brought, as a writer, an organizer, and an activist, was the then radical conviction that gender, race, class, age, and ethnicity were all targets of inequality, and belonged together in any over-arching struggle for human and civil rights.

In December, 1971, a forty-page preview issue of what would become *Ms.* appeared as a supplement in the year-end issue of *New York*. (“*Ms.*” was a status-free form of address dating from the seventeenth century. In 1971,

the New York Democratic congresswoman and take-no-prisoners feminist firebrand Bella Abzug introduced the bill that made it legal.) In return for those forty pages, Felker paid for the printing and publishing of the first issue, which went on the stands, at a hundred and forty pages, in January. "Clay had the sense to know that he couldn't start a women's magazine," Steinem said. "He said—I mean this! He said, 'If more women were imported from the islands, you wouldn't need a feminist movement, since it's really all about child care.'"

The cover of the *Ms.* preview issue was a housewife "goddess," painted bright blue (the color of Krishna). She had a baby glowing in her belly and eight arms, each one holding up a tool of her unpaid trade: an iron, a steering wheel, a mirror, a ringing phone, a clock, a duster, a frying pan, and a typewriter. The features included Jane O'Reilly's instant classic "The Housewife's Moment of Truth"; Steinem's essay "On Sisterhood"; a feminist evaluation of the Presidential candidates that year; and a declaration, "We Have Had Abortions," that was signed by Steinem and fifty-two other well-known women, among them Nora Ephron, Lee Grant, Lillian Hellman, Billie Jean King, and Anaïs Nin. The issue sold

out in eight days. Within a few years, there were half a million subscribers.

Once a month, Steinem spends an evening with a few old friends from the magazine. She calls those evenings "our group-therapy sessions," and by the time I joined them one night, she was sharing desserts with Joanne Edgar and Suzanne Braun Levine.

Levine was the editor of *Ms.* for its first seventeen years. She arrived there a magazine veteran. "I was lucky," she told me. "I was the right age and had the right amount of experience, and I came with a whole color-coded production chart. I arrived at the office for my interview, and right away Gloria brought me coffee. I never looked back." Edgar, a founding editor, had met Steinem in the summer of '71, shortly before the long-anticipated Equal Rights Amendment passed the House of Representatives. (It passed the Senate in the spring, only to be defeated, a few years later, when a state-by-state referendum fell three states short of the number required to become law.) Bella Abzug, rallying America's feminists to fight with their votes, had helped put together the National Women's Political Caucus that summer. Steinem, a founding member, travelled the country, organizing and speaking, and Edgar, a Southerner, was

dispatched to Mississippi and Missouri to work on political campaigns. Back in New York, after the elections, she joined the ranks of feminists with mattress privileges in the loft that Steinem had built above her dining table and went to work at *Ms.*

A few minutes into dessert, the women began reminiscing about *Ms.* "before the Australians"—meaning the Australian media group that took over the magazine during a slump in 1987. Two years later, a group of American feminists was able to buy it back, and eventually Steinem helped form a foundation to keep the magazine in print, ad-free, as a monthly. It is a quarterly now, and its moment is in some ways past, but the message it sent was clearly heard, and today mass women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* vet political candidates for their stands on women's issues, and groups like Emily's List raise money to rank and support feminists among those candidates.

In the early nineties, Steinem decided that something important was missing in the peripatetic life that she describes as "the mixture of freedom and insecurity I needed." By then, she owned two floors of the brownstone, but the only part that felt like home to her, and not a way station and movement hostel, was her desk and the garden off her study—and that was thanks to a green-thumbed reporter named Irene Kubota Neves, who had interviewed her, years earlier, for *People*, and, lacking a garden of her own to love, adopted Steinem's.

The result was that Steinem went shopping. She started collecting furniture and fabrics. She bought frames for the photographs, pictures, poems, and letters that document the stages of her life on the road, including an almost comically deranged Christmas letter sent in 1971 to friends and family by a right-wing second cousin whom she had met four times, when she was in her teens. After wishing everyone a Merry Christmas, the cousin digressed, accusing Steinem, who at the time was raising money for the Angela Davis defense fund, of letting herself be "brainwashed" into endorsing such an "un-American" cause as the Black Panthers. "Gloria is the first of our name to depart from the American principles



"Love the exposed chessboard."



as to help our sworn enemies, so we must repudiate her pronouncements and disclaim the cousinship. Love and kisses.” Steinem told me, “I was thrilled to get it. Suppose he had liked me?”

The walls of her living room are painted a warm, deep Indian yellow. There are pillows everywhere, kilims on the floor, and an old wooden fireplace, with a couple of painted wooden figures, carved like mermaids—“I think from an Indian carousel,” Steinem told me—lying on the mantelpiece, and, hanging between them, a long, thick, heavily decorated black tunic from Afghanistan, or maybe Kashmir. The room is cozy and crowded. When it gets too crowded, Steinem gives something away. “It’s how I redecorate,” she says.

Posters cover the walls of the front hall—a time line of the movement as it has changed during the course of her life. For years, Steinem made it a rule never to lecture or organize unless a woman of color was invited with her—a woman who could reach women whose problems of discrimination were far greater than her own—and also for courage, because she is prone to stage-fright. (“Ironically,” she told me. “A media worker who loses her saliva before a talk and has to carry a mouth spray in her bag.”) There are posters of Steinem on the road with Dorothy Pittman-Hughes, the African-American activist who had opened a multiracial feminist day-care center in New York, and, later in the seventies, with the great black activist Flo Kennedy (who brought down the house one night when a redneck in the audience demanded to know if she and Steinem were lesbians, and she replied, “Are *you* my alternative?”). And there are posters from fund-raising galas of the past few decades, when feminism became a fashionable liberal cause, and women with money began sitting on movement boards.

Steinem welcomed them all—the rich, the celebrities, the climbers for the cause. She was a radical but, consciously, never an outsider. She enjoyed the world where she plied her trade as an entrepreneur of social change, and, with her mouth spray at hand, she had long since mastered the subterfuges of talking truth to power. You could call it consciousness-raising—on a wider canvas. When

she went to Los Angeles to speak at a big Equality Now benefit last fall, she told me how much she was looking forward to a meeting with the honchos at Creative Artists Agency the next day. They were going to discuss the status of women in the film industry—their comparatively low numbers, their discrepant salaries—and it didn’t matter if those women were movie stars or grips, or if her meeting required a large application of charm, dazzle, and good humor. She was ready for that.

For Steinem, the “conflagration of consciousness” that transformed second-wave feminism into a national movement occurred on November 18, 1977, when Bella Abzug—having persuaded Congress to authorize, and fund, a National Women’s Conference, in Houston—took the stage. It was an occasion that Steinem describes in her new book, beginning with the sentence “This conference may take the prize as the most important event nobody knows about.” Steinem had already spent nearly a year organizing with Abzug, her congressional colleagues Patsy Mink and Shirley Chisholm, and a commission, appointed by President Carter, asking other American women what they, as women, wanted. She had travelled, state by state, to insure a more or less consistent process for the election of Houston delegates, and discovered, to her shock, the extent to which grass-roots groups of ultra-conservative women were prepared to co-opt that process—or, as she puts it, “Success can be as disastrous as failure—and it almost was.”

Two thousand official delegates came to the conference to discuss and vote on twenty-six different planks, from child care and lesbian rights, to foreign policy, and they were joined by eighteen thousand observers, making it, Steinem says, “probably the most geographically, racially, and economically representative body this nation has ever seen.”

Steinem describes her “surprise duty” at the conference as that of a scribe, since she had been asked by the various caucuses of women of color to collect and coordinate both their particular and their shared concerns and put them together in a plank that would re-

place the “so-called Minority Women’s Plank” submitted by various state conferences. What Steinem doesn’t describe is the extent of the women’s trust in her to do that. She had fought in solidarity with these women for years. “There is no competition of tears in feminism,” she once told me. “If you’ve suffered discrimination, you’re sensitive to it on every level. I learned feminism largely from black women. Women of color basically invented feminism.”

The women of color who came as delegates to Houston were scattered across the country. They had never met as a group before. “It was the first time I realized that being a writer was also being an activist,” Steinem told me. The African-American women raised “the umbrella issues of racism and poverty.” The Asian-Americans added language barriers, sweatshops, and isolation. The Chicana women added the ever-present fear of deportation—and of having to leave their children behind to be brought up by strangers. But Steinem says that nothing prepared her for the Native American women, who wanted to protect their languages and their culture, and to reclaim something of the tribal sovereignty guaranteed by the treaties that, as often as not, had betrayed them. They had one of the toughest jobs in Houston: to educate the only country we have, as one of the delegates put it, to the fact that we are also here.

The conference was a green light for millions of American women, including liberal Republican women—an endangered species now. (Betty Ford, who had campaigned for the E.R.A. and been a strong supporter of abortion rights, spoke there, along with Lady Bird Johnson and Rosalynn Carter.) The N.W.C. delivered a political program that included equal employment, equal pay, and, crucially, full reproductive rights.

In the decades since then, feminists here and abroad have travelled, connected, and discovered that, in a new “world economy” of labor migration, immigration, and capital exploitation, women everywhere are at risk. The Global Fund for Women was founded by three Palo Alto feminists in 1987 and Equality Now in 1992, by Jessica

Neuwirth, an American lawyer who had worked for Amnesty International; Navi Pillay, a South African lawyer; and Feryal Gharahi, an Iranian women's-rights lawyer. A year later, the Iraqi-American activist Zainab Salbi put together Women for Women International. The issues for those groups now involve the kinds of violence against women that cross borders and increase as wars proliferate and the gaps in wealth widen.

In America, sex trafficking is said to be as high today as in any other country. Honor killings and forced marriages have been reported. Female genital mutilation, which affects ninety per cent of girls and women in countries like Somalia and Egypt, is now practiced within the diaspora here, despite a ban dating from the Clinton Presidency. According to Yasmeen Hassan, the global executive director of Equality Now, and the author of the first book on domestic violence to appear in Pakistan, more than five hundred thousand girls and women in the United States either are at risk of having F.G.M. or have already had it.

Steinem's friends say that she can spot a strong feminist like Hassan from a helicopter, the way Sarah Palin claims she can spot a moose. It's part of Steinem's organizational agenda, and it can happen anywhere—on the street, or in a restaurant, or in line at a movie, when a stranger comes up to her and they begin to talk. It can even happen on the telephone. Pamela Shifman was a young white American working in South Africa, four years after apartheid ended, as a legal adviser to the parliamentary women's caucus of the African National Congress, when someone in her office said, "This woman from your country, someone named Gloria Steinem, keeps calling. She wants to be helpful, so here's her phone number." Shifman called. "We'd never met, but Gloria was coming to South Africa for a conference, and she said, 'I can stay on. Just tell me for how long, and let me do whatever you need me for,'" Shifman said. "She stayed a week. She worked with me on organizing strategies, and went to meetings with me, from morning to night. The only thing she asked of me was to take her to see the Rain Queen of the

Balobedu"—whose job was to make rain, and to carry and pass on the oral history of her people. "Gloria had a ring, from her friend Wilma Mankiller, the Chief of the Cherokee Nation, to give to the queen, and she did."

Steinem was determined that I speak with other women who, like Shifman, came of age during the eighties and nineties and are known in the movement as "third wave" feminists. Amy Richards was the first. "The smartest person I know," Steinem said. Richards went to work for Steinem as a Barnard intern and now works alongside her on nearly every project, while at the same time, with a partner, writing books, running a young-feminist speakers bureau called Soapbox, and shepherding groups of college students through an intensive week of consultations and tough encounters at a Feminist Boot Camp.

One night, Steinem crossed Central Park to visit Jessica Neuwirth, the later second-wave feminist who co-founded Equality Now but who, in the spirit of the third wave, had launched an online feminist nonprofit called Donor Direct Action, designed to connect donors with the grass-roots groups they support abroad. Neuwirth was grappling with a crisis involving one of her most at-risk recipient groups—a highly visible women's-rights organization in Libya, whose director, Salwa Bugaighis, a fearless lawyer, had just been murdered by five assassins in her home, in Benghazi; Bugaighis's husband had been abducted and her sister threatened that she was "next."

Neuwirth had also invited Navi Pillay over and she wanted Steinem and Pillay—until last year, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights—to help talk her through her choices and advise her on what to do to avoid exposing any successors to Bugaighis to the same risks. Steinem pointed out that every feminist active in Libya knew them, and, by being active, had chosen to take them on. Pillay listened, reserving judgment. Ten days later, Neuwirth introduced her donors to the Salwa Fund, using a video made by Bugaighis before her death. The video was now called "Rest in Peace, Salwa." And the crisis remains unresolved.

Ai-jen Poo, the advocate for domestic workers and caregivers who won a MacArthur "genius award" last year, was another woman on Steinem's list. Poo had started organizing as a student, and at twenty-two, with a grant from the Ms. Foundation, she began to organize domestic workers nationally—ninety per cent of them minority women—into associations. Today, at forty-one, she is the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, with forty-seven affiliates across the country, representing fifteen thousand members. Poo once described Steinem to me as the feminist "who broke down all the silos of separation"—a second-wave feminist with a third-wave commitment to collective leadership and voice. "A lot of people talk about 'network theory' now," she said. "It's become an all-feminist strategy. But Gloria was always dedicated to lifting other women up, to sharing leadership with them. It was never about herself. And, because of that, for young feminists, it's the new norm."

This was evident when three of those younger feminists arrived at Steinem's house one night for a few hours of vegetarian take-out, catching up, and sharing stories. Salamishah Tillet, a professor of English and African Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, came with her sister Scheherazade, an artist-in-residence at the Art Institute of Chicago. Scheherazade is the director of A Long Walk Home, the nonprofit they founded together, "to educate, inspire, and mobilize young people to end violence against girls and women." Salamishah, six months pregnant with her second child (her husband was at home with the first), reluctantly took the roomiest armchair, at Steinem's urging. Scheherazade tucked herself into the corner of a couch. Pamela Shifman, who is now the executive director of NoVo Foundation, one of America's largest nonprofits for girls and women (it was founded by Warren Buffett's son Peter and Peter's wife, Jennifer), opted for the floor, having made the shortest commute, from Brooklyn. And the playwright and performer Sarah Jones, best known for her Tony Award-winning multi-character piece "Bridge & Tunnel," joined us, by way of a Skype video



stream, from the West Village, where she was in jet-lag meltdown after three weeks in Europe, interviewing prostitutes for a new show she was developing called “Sell/Buy/Date.”

Jones had spent some of her trip sitting in a red-lit storefront window in Amsterdam, soliciting. “I wanted to have this experience,” she told her friends at Steinem’s. But it was the prostitutes themselves—“the politics” of their indoctrination—who unsettled her. “It was very fraught for me to hear them rage against the anti-trafficking movement in America,” Jones said. “They talked about ‘sex workers’ rights’ in Western Europe. They said, ‘We are voluntary migrant labor here. We have health care, education, a safety net. We like our jobs.’ I asked those women, ‘If you had a daughter, would you want this for her?’”

The women responded to Jones with some preoccupations of their own. Salamishah, who had been raped herself, talked about rape victims, who become “super invisible,” even and especially to themselves, and asked the group, “How do you intervene without using the language of pathology?” Scheherazade asked, “How do we create” a new language? Steinem quoted the runaway slave and abolitionist Harriet Tubman—who, on forays into the South, freed hundreds of other slaves—saying, “I could have saved thousands if only they knew they were slaves.” And Shifman talked about the women who used to be housed at the Bayview Correctional Facility, in Manhattan, across from Chelsea Piers. Bayview, a notoriously cruel women’s prison, was closed three years ago, and its prisoners were transferred. Shifman said that at one point the prison—its women scarred from puberty by the inextricable triad of poverty, prostitution, and drugs—had the highest percentage of staff sexual misconduct of any prison in the United States.

The conversation was wide-ranging, but by the end of the evening no one, including Jones, knew what, exactly, to make of that week in Amsterdam.

It’s safe to say that for feminists in their twenties—think “fourth wave” feminists—social media has put an expiration date on many of the old certainties. The Internet effect has argu-



*“I know we didn’t accomplish anything, but that’s what meetings are for.”*

ably been paradoxical, something that is at once concentrating and diluting the political energy and solidarity of the women’s movement, leaving young women free to confront new issues in necessarily new ways.

Those issues—sex-work issues, race issues, sexual-assault issues, police-brutality issues, even transgender issues and language-identity issues—have in fact always been movement issues and, in particular, Steinem’s issues. She worked hard to get lesbian rights included in the platform of the N.W.C. in 1977. (Even Friedan, who called lesbians “the lavender menace,” voted for it.) And her record on racism and police brutality has been unimpeachable. (“Violence in any patriarchy begins at home, in the family,” she told me.)

She likes to point out that today’s generational byword, “intersectionality,” was in fact coined in the late eighties, by the African-American law professor and race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who used it to describe interconnected forms of discrimination, whose consequences each woman has to balance and negotiate, and feminists have to acknowledge and understand.

Steinem readily acknowledges that the Internet has been revolutionary in giving feminists—particularly black

and gay feminists, who in the past were largely unheard by the mainstream media—a voice, and that some important young feminists are now emerging through platforms like Twitter. But she is wary about calling the Internet effect unequivocally “democratizing,” as many of those feminists claim.

“It’s great that we can now sidestep the editorial judgments of the mainstream media,” she told me. “But it’s important to remember that conflict makes news, conflict gets attention, and the Internet thrives on conflict. You have to ask where a lot of these posts about our so-called divisions on issues like race and gender come from. What’s the context? Who’s arguing? And, remember, you have to be able to afford an iPhone or a computer; you have to be literate, which a lot of women in the world are not; and you still have to make change happen in real life, because empathy—the ability not just to know but to feel—only happens when we are together with all five senses. This is part of the reason people can be so hostile to each other on the Web, and women, especially, are subject to so much Web harassment.”

Two debates that have played out online particularly trouble Steinem. One involves the idea of prostitution

as sex work—a legitimate trade that women can decide to practice, and which should be protected through legal regulation, as advocates argue, rather than one that women are forced into, as Steinem is inclined to believe. “The word ‘work’ can be double-edged,” she told me. “The problem of legitimizing the sex trade as work, the way it’s done in Germany, for example, is that ‘work’ has consequences, one being that you are required to do just that—work—and if you refuse to accept a client, or to do something a client wants, you can be fired, or worse.” Then, there’s the matter of choice. Steinem finds it unlikely that anyone actually chooses to be a sex worker, certainly not when she’s twelve years old—roughly the average age of entry into prostitution—or when the rate of trauma and injury among prostitutes is comparable to that of soldiers in wartime, or when what qualifies as consent, in legal terms, may

not be consensual at all but enforced. There are exceptions, she says: “Women who make their own arrangements, privately and directly, with a client, and whose only worry is likely to be a big bill from the I.R.S.”

Late last month, Sarah Jones introduced her working version of “Sell/Buy/Date” at a packed preview, playing fourteen characters, women and men, each with a different story, and view, of his or her experience in the sex trade. After the preview, Steinem joined her onstage for a conversation. She said that the only system that, for now, seems to work for women in the trade and not against them is one called the Nordic Model, which originated in Sweden and has been adopted by several other northern European countries. Sex traffickers, sex-tour managers, brothel owners, and pimps—the people selling the bodies of men, women, and children for their own

profit—are arrested. Their clients are fined. The sex workers themselves are free to continue working, and are offered alternative work and training, which they can choose whether or not to take.

The other battle that troubles Steinem began in 2008, when Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were competing for the Democratic Presidential nomination. Steinem does not officially join political campaigns, on principle, “because if you work on a campaign anything you say reflects on your candidate, and I want—no, I need—to be free to disagree.” But over the years she has stumped independently for countless candidates, as she did for Clinton in the run-up to the Democratic Convention that year (and hopes to do again in the run-up to 2016). Early in the campaign, she had written an Op-Ed in the *Times*, which the editors entitled, to her surprise and distress, “Women Are Never Front-Runners.”

In it, she presented a hypothetical female Obama, with all of Obama’s characteristics and credentials but the Y chromosome—her point being that, at that moment in the country’s history, the combination of “black” and “woman” still amounted to a kind of double negative and would be deadly at the polls. In her view, gender was the greater hindrance. “Actually, I didn’t think either of them had a chance, but if one did it would be Obama,” she told me. “In fact, I said that what we needed was eight years of a President Clinton and eight more years of a President Obama. (When Obama won the nomination, she stumped enthusiastically for him, and, four years later, did it again.) In her Op-Ed, she said that she was backing Clinton, because of her greater experience. “What worries me,” she wrote, “is that he is seen as unifying by his race while she is seen as divisive by her sex. . . . It’s time to take equal pride in breaking all the barriers. We have to be able to say: ‘I’m supporting her because she’ll be a great president *and* because she’s a woman.’”

Mainstream media paid modest attention to Steinem’s piece. Online, however, it fed a divisive debate that, according to Rebecca Traister, the author of a book about the 2008 campaign, “Big Girls Don’t Cry,” was simmering





beneath the surface. Steinem was attacked for being a privileged white woman out of touch with the times.

In August this year, Daunasia Yancey and Julius Jones, two young activists from Black Lives Matter, had a backstage confrontation with Hillary Clinton that was taped, and the video made its way online. The subject was “three strikes and you’re out,” a habitual-offenders law introduced by Bill Clinton in 1994 and adopted over the years, in various forms, by twenty-four states. Yancey and Jones accused Hillary Clinton of complicity in that law, which, although it was drafted to discourage serious offenders and keep them off the streets, had in fact contributed to mass incarceration of black men, often for minor offenses, swelling a prison population that was already about fifty per cent black. At the end of a demonstrably tense exchange, Clinton said, “Look, I don’t believe you change hearts. I believe you change laws, you change the allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate.”

I asked Alicia Garza, the thirty-four-year-old co-founder of B.L.M.—who also works as the special-projects director of Ai-jen Poo’s National Domestic Workers Alliance—about that exchange. “We have twenty-six chapters nationally, and no one leader speaks for black people,” she said. “But what you saw on that video was the dialectic between policy change and culture change. I was disappointed in Hillary—to be honest, I was sad to see her admonishing two young people. She advocated new laws, when what she should have said is ‘The movement has made this issue front and center and changed my heart.’ Hillary should take notes from Gloria, who has always pushed boundaries around,” Garza, who works closely with Steinem, told me. “Gloria spoke to the fact—it was in her bones—that race was and has to be a feminist issue.”

A few days later, Steinem was in New Jersey, giving a talk that ended—as all her talks have since she marched in a Black Lives Matter demonstration—with B.L.M.’s three principles: “Lead with love. Low ego, high impact. Move at the speed of trust.” She also wrote a post on Facebook that

read “Trump’s greatest damage to women was to raise sympathy for Carly Fiorina by attacking her appearance. . . . If you thought Republicans could find no woman more damaging to the diversity and needs of the female half of this country than Sarah Palin, take a good look at Carly Fiorina and what she stands for.” Steinem told me that, given platforms like Fiorina’s and those of virtually all the other Republican Presidential



candidates—defunding Planned Parenthood, rescinding reproductive rights, abolishing Obamacare, criminalizing immigration, and, with a big nod to industry, denying or ignoring climate change—the left will have to pull together and win.

Five years ago, Steinem’s friend Wilma Mankiller died, at the age of sixty-five, with Steinem among the friends and family at her bedside. Mankiller had been the first elected chief of the Cherokee Nation, and she and Steinem had been close ever since she joined the board of the Ms. Foundation. Over the years, Mankiller had become, for Steinem, a kind of spiritual guide—the way Abzug had been her guide through the corridors of Washington power. It was Mankiller, she says, who continued her education in the “deep history” of matrilineality, and the communal talking circles that expressed it. “We have always started our ‘history’ with when hierarchy, patriarchy, and nationalism started,” Steinem told me. “But democracy did not come from Greece. It is much, much older, and it came from women and men together.” She added, “The Iroquois Confederacy had circles of consensus—it was matrilineal.”

A few years before Mankiller died, she and Steinem finished an outline and a preface for a book that they were planning to write together. “It was going

to be a brief, practical book, citing moments and practices from the past that could be useful to women now,” Steinem said. She intends to finish the book now. “I want to contribute our idea that most of human history was very different from what we have today, with our monotheistic patriarchies and their ‘pyramid’ structures of authority from the top,” she said. “Many peoples were—and some still are—not gender-based in their languages. And there was rarely a single chief. There was always a chief for peace, and a different one for war. Their societies were not polarized, and not violence-based.” The jury is out on that. Many archeologists and anthropologists would disagree. But, as an organizing principle for Steinem, and for the feminists she has brought together, the evocation of an ancient tradition of talking circles for sharing stories, bridging differences, and coming to acceptable common solutions has been a remarkably effective tool.

One night, I asked Steinem about the future. “I learn, I give,” she told me. “I have the greatest luxury of thinking I might make a difference. I say to myself, ask myself: Can anyone else do what I do? If not, I should keep doing what I can uniquely do. For me, it’s a combination of responsibility and pleasure.

“People are always asking me, ‘Who will you pass the torch to?’ The question makes me angry. There is no one torch—there are many torches—and I’m using my torch to light other torches. There shouldn’t have been a ‘first’ Gloria Steinem, and there won’t be a last one.” Steinem has placed her house in trust as a place where feminists can meet, work, write, and, if they need to, stay. “I don’t plan to die,” she said, laughing. “I’ll be at home, with those women. I’ll live with them here.” Steinem says, sometimes, that her funeral will be a benefit.

At the beginning of “My Life on the Road,” there is a dedication to John Sharpe, the doctor who helped Steinem in London, fifty-eight years ago. “Dear Dr. Sharpe,” it says. “I believe you, who knew the law was unjust, would not mind if I say this so long after your death: I’ve done the best I could with my life. This book is for you.” ♦

## DRAWING BLOOD

*A French graphic novelist's shocking memoir of the Middle East.*

BY ADAM SHATZ

One of Riad Sattouf's favorite places in Paris is the Musée du Quai Branly, a temple of ethnographic treasures from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, not far from the Eiffel Tower. One morning in mid-July, Sattouf, a French-Syrian comic-book artist who has recently emerged as France's best-known graphic novelist, took me there, along with his year-old son, his son's Ivorian nanny, and her three small daughters. He was dressed like a college student, with jeans, a black Lacoste T-shirt, white Stan Smith sneakers, and backpack. We were met in the lobby by Stéphane Martin, the museum's president, who is a long-standing admirer of Sattouf's work and has commissioned him to produce a graphic novel about the museum for its tenth anniversary, next year.

No French Presidency is complete without a legacy-defining monument; the Quai Branly, which opened in 2006, was Jacques Chirac's. Designed by Jean Nouvel, it is a museum of so-called "first art," or what used to be called primitive art. The interior—hushed, ceremonial lighting, earth-tone colors, leather upholstery—suggests the study of a retired colonial administrator, and an aura of tribal kitsch pervades the place. The Quai Branly is at once a voluptuous tribute to the riches of French ethnography (several of the pieces came from the collections of Claude Lévi-Strauss and others) and a reminder of a history of overseas plunder.

Martin has been involved in the museum since its conception, in 1998. I asked him if he had a background in ethnography. "No, I'm an *énarque*," he said, as if that explained everything. (*Énarques* are graduates of the École Nationale d'Administration, a Mandarin class who more or less run France.) Sattouf listened quietly to Martin as we strolled along the long nave where most

of the museum's artifacts are exhibited. At one point, the children wandered off and Martin took the opportunity to show Sattouf "a little porno," directing his attention to a sculpture from Papua New Guinea that depicted a group of young men being penetrated by their elders. By filling them with sperm, Martin explained, the elders were inducting the next generation into leadership. Sattouf looked riveted and took photographs. He said, "What I love about this museum is that you see that in every society gender relations are structured to preserve the power of men, but it's always achieved in a different way."

Masculine power and its violent rituals are at the center of Sattouf's work. His caustic, often brutal vision of how boys are groomed to become men has brought him acclaim far beyond the underground-comics scene where he first made his name. Last year, he scored his greatest success so far when he published the first volume of a graphic memoir, "The Arab of the Future," recounting his childhood, which was split between France and two of the most closed societies of the Arab world, Muammar Qaddafi's Libya and Hafez al-Assad's Syria. (The first volume is now being published here; in France, a second volume appeared in May.)

Not since "Persepolis," Marjane Satrapi's memoir of her childhood in Khomeini's Iran, has a comic book achieved such crossover appeal in France. In Paris, I kept running into people who had just read it, among them a former president of Doctors Without Borders, a young official in the foreign ministry who had worked throughout the Middle East, and an economist for the city of Paris. "The Arab of the Future" has become that rare thing in France's polarized intellectual climate: an object of consensual rapture, hailed as a masterpiece in the leading journals of both the left and the right.

Sattouf has achieved prominence as a cartoonist of Muslim heritage at a time when French anxieties about Islam have never been higher and when cartooning has become an increasingly dangerous trade. For a decade, Sattouf was the only cartoonist of Middle Eastern extraction at the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, where he drew an acid series on Parisian street life, "The Secret Life of Youth." He left just a few months before two jihadists stormed the offices and shot dead twelve people, including nine of his former colleagues. The attackers, brothers of Algerian ancestry who were born in Paris, said that they were avenging the Prophet Muhammad for the magazine's mockery of the Muslim faith.

Sattouf, whose teens were spent in a housing project in Brittany, often jokes self-consciously about his success. One day, as we waited to be seated at a stylish little sushi restaurant decorated with Godzilla posters, I asked him if he often ate out. "I can already see the first lines in *The New Yorker*," he replied. "Riad Sattouf has lots of money because his book is a best-seller. He's a rich Arab. He spends all his days eating in expensive restaurants."

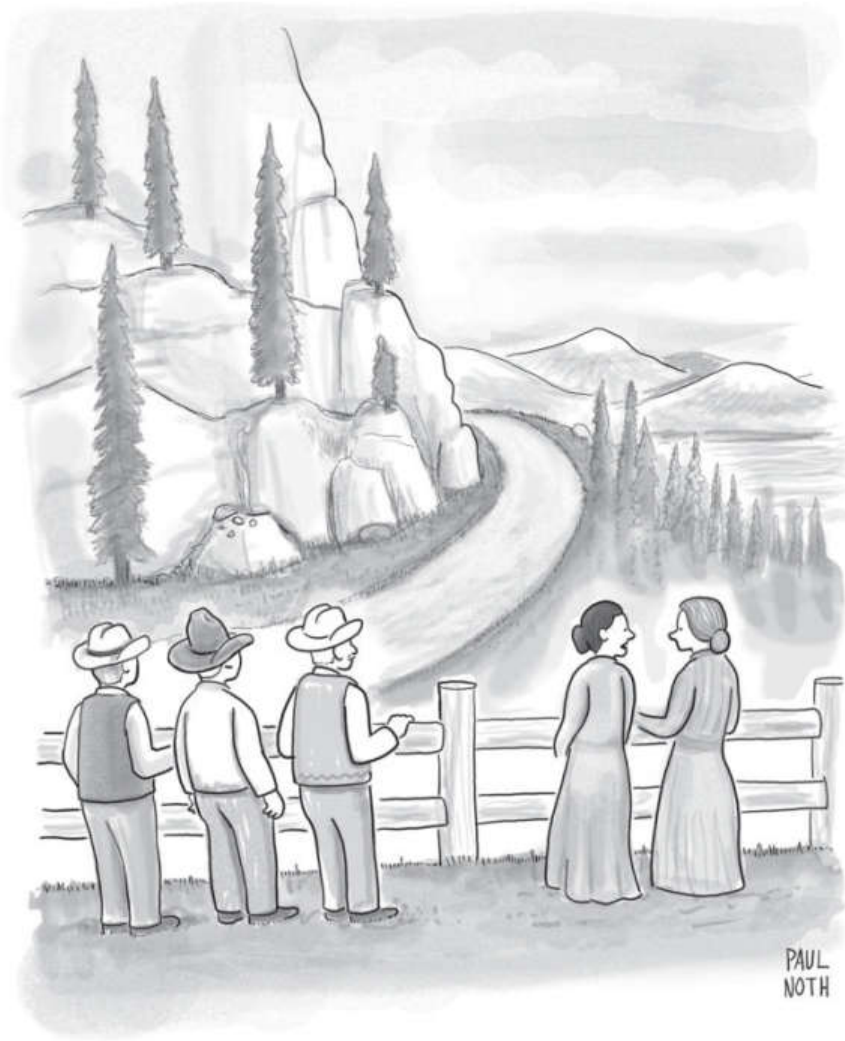
This was one of the few times I'd heard Sattouf refer to himself as an Arab. He claims to have forgotten the Arabic he learned in Syria, has no Arab friends, doesn't follow the news from the Middle East, and knows no one in the Paris-based Syrian opposition. He told me that the first and only time he'd set foot in the Arab world since he left Syria was a weekend in Marrakech a few years ago. "It left me uneasy," he said. "I had the feeling people were suffering from a lack of freedom, while Europeans were in bars eating *tartare de dorade*."

Sattouf loathes nationalism and is fond of the saying, paraphrased from Salman Rushdie, "A man does not have





*Riad Sattouf, for a decade the only cartoonist of Arab heritage at Charlie Hebdo, has tapped into French anxieties about Islam.*



*"She'll be driving six white horses when she comes. She'll be driving six white horses when she comes. She'll be driving six white horses, she'll be driving six white horses, she'll be driving six white horses when she comes. I can't compete with that."*

•      •

roots, he has feet." He says that he feels "closer to a comic-book artist from Japan than I do to a Syrian or a French person." Yet he has become famous for a book set largely in two countries where some of the most violent convulsions since the Arab Spring have unfolded. "The Arab of the Future" has, in effect, made him the Arab of the present in France.

Sattouf was born in 1978, in Paris. His mother and father—whom he calls Clémentine and Abdel-Razak, respectively, in his memoir—met in the early seventies in a cafeteria at the Sorbonne. According to the book, his

father, who was finishing up a dissertation there, was born in a Syrian village near Homs; his mother was from a Catholic family in Brittany. When Sattouf was two, his father accepted a university job in Libya, where Qaddafi was building his "state of the masses." Like many Arabs of his generation, Abdel-Razak Sattouf was a fervent believer in the pan-Arab dream. He hoped that the region would overcome the legacy of colonialism and recover its strength under the leadership of charismatic modernizers—secular autocrats like his hero Gamal Abdel Nasser. By moving back to the Arab world, he hoped to take part in this

project, and to rear his son as "the Arab of the future."

In Libya, the family was given a house but no keys, because the Great Leader had abolished private property; they returned home one day to find it occupied by another family. Food was scarce; sometimes they subsisted on bananas. Clémentine was fired from her job reading the news in French on Libyan radio: she could not contain her laughter while quoting Qaddafi's threat to invade the United States and assassinate President Reagan. (She's the Marge Simpson of "The Arab of the Future," rolling her eyes as her husband quotes the maxims of Qaddafi's manifesto, "The Green Book.")

A couple of years later, after the birth of Sattouf's brother, Abdel-Razak got a job teaching in Damascus, and moved the family to Ter Maaleh, the village where he'd grown up. Austere and piously Sunni, Ter Maaleh proved even more trying than Libya. The streets smelled of human excrement. Sexual segregation was rigorously observed. At family gatherings, the women cooked for the men, and waited to eat whatever morsels were left. Everywhere you looked, the eyes of the President stared down at you from billboards and posters.

During these years, Sattouf would return to France each summer, spending it with his mother's family in Brittany. In "The Arab of the Future," Sattouf represents the three countries in which he grew up with washes of color: gray-blue for France, yellow for Libya, a pinkish red for Syria. These washes—"colors of emotion," Sattouf calls them—create a powerfully claustrophobic effect, as if each country were its own sealed-off environment. A rough draftsman, Sattouf relies on simplification, exaggeration, and other scrappy effects, in the way that a newspaper cartoonist might. He draws his figures in black-and-white, and distills their features in a few expressive gestures: enormous noses, dots for eyes, single lines for eyebrows. It is not a sumptuous visual style, but it is an effective one, particularly in its evocation of the way in which a child sees the world. Sattouf has cited Hergé as one of his primary influences, but his sensibility is closer to "South Park" than to "Tintin."



"The Arab of the Future" immerses the reader in the sensory impressions of childhood, particularly its smells. Little Riad uses his nose to navigate his worlds, Arab and French, and to find his place in them. He identifies his relatives by their smell: the sweat of his Syrian grandmother, which he prefers to the perfume of his French grandmother; the "sour smell" of his maternal grandfather. "When I started to remember this period, I realized that many of my memories were of sounds and smells," Sattouf told me. "I remembered that every woman I knew in the village had a very different odor. And the people whose odor I preferred were generally the ones who were the kindest to me. I find that's still true today."

The Syrian boys Sattouf met were like "little men," intimidatingly fluent in the rhetoric of warfare. The first Arabic word he learned from them was *yehudi*, "Jew." It was hurled at him at a family gathering by two of his cousins, who proceeded to pounce on him. Fighting the Israeli Army was the most popular schoolyard game. The Jew was "a kind of evil creature for us," Sattouf told me, though no one had actually seen one. (Sattouf writes, "I tried to be the most aggressive one toward the Jews, to prove that I wasn't one of them.") Another pastime was killing small animals: the first volume of "The Arab of the Future" concludes with the lynching of a puppy.

Ter Maaleh was Abdel-Razak's home, but he hadn't been back in seventeen years, and he was nearly as much of a stranger there as his wife, the only woman in the village who didn't cover herself. His older brother, who never expected him to return, had sold much of his land. Abdel-Razak tried to ingratiate himself with more powerful men, like his cousin, a general in the Syrian Army. He had little affection for the regime, and even less for the Alawite minority that dominated it, but he was desperate to improve his fortunes. "My father was a collaborator," Sattouf says. "I think what he liked about Assad was that he had come from a very poor background and ended up ruling over other people. Assad had a destiny, and my father thought that he might, too. He was completely fascinated by power."

Much of the pathos of the memoir comes from Sattouf's depiction of his father, a dreamer full of bluster, driven by impotent fury at the West; a secularist who can't quite free himself from superstition; a man who wants to give orders but whose lot is to follow them. He is embarrassed by his son's vulnerability, which reminds him of his own; he proclaims himself the master of the household but usually defers to his more practical wife. For all his rants against Jews, Africans, and, above all, the Shia, he remains strangely endearing, a kind of Arab Archie Bunker. The great drama of the book lies less in Riad's adventures than in his father's gradual surrender to local traditions.

One of those traditions was honor killing. When Sattouf was seven, a cousin of his, a thirty-five-year-old widow who taught him to draw, was suffocated to death by her father and her brother, who had discovered that she was pregnant. In the second volume of "The Arab of the Future," little Riad learns of her death while eavesdropping on a conversation between his parents. Clémentine is aghast at the murder, while Abdel-Razak tries to have it both ways: Yes, he says, honor crimes are "terrible," but in rural Syria becoming pregnant outside marriage "is the worst dishonor that a girl can bring upon her family." Clémentine pressures Abdel-Razak to report the crime, and the men are imprisoned. But only a few months later the couple pass one of them on the street. Clémentine is shocked, and her husband reveals that the sentence was commuted as part of a deal between the authorities and the family. People in the village, he says, were "beginning to say the Sattoufs were weak" because they had sent to prison "a man who had done nothing but preserve the honor of his family." We see him turning away from his wife, his hands clasped behind his back. In "The Arab of the Future," his accommodation is nearly as heartbreaking as the killing itself.

In 1990, Abdel-Razak and Clémentine separated. Clémentine took her sons to live in Brittany. Sattouf and his father exchanged letters, but he says that "the rupture was total." Clémentine eventually found work as a

medical secretary, but for several years she was unemployed, and the family lived on welfare in public housing. Sattouf says he felt no less out of place in school in France—and scarcely less bullied—than he had in Syria. His blond hair turned black and curly, and, he recalled, "I went from being an elf to a troll. I was voted the ugliest person in class." Accused of being a Jew in Syria, he was now gay-baited because of his high voice. "Those experiences gave me an immense affection for Jews and gays," he said.

Then there was his name. In Arabic, the names Riad and Sattouf had what he described as "an impressive solemnity." In French, they sounded like *rire de sa touffe*, which means "laugh at her pussy." When teachers took attendance, "people would burst out laughing. It was impossible for a girl to date a guy whose name meant 'I laughed at your pussy.'" As a result, he said, "I lived a very violent solitude. This is something a lot of illustrators have in common."

For our first meeting, Sattouf proposed that I come to a café near his apartment, not far from the Place de la République, where he lives with his partner—a comic-book editor—and their son. When he saw me waiting for him outside the café, he said, "What, you didn't enter? Let's enter! I can't believe it, I am speaking English!" Sattouf immediately shifted to French; he reserves English—to be precise, a caricature of American-accented English—for jokes and impersonations, as if it were intrinsically humorous.

After coffee, we walked over to Sattouf's apartment so that I could see his studio. He draws at his desk on Photoshop, facing a wall of bookshelves stacked with comic books and works on Paris photography by Atget and Doisneau. There was an old photograph of the Italian actress Valeria Golino, whom he cast in "Les Beaux Gosses," a hit movie about a provincial high school that he made a few years ago. ("I used to masturbate a lot thinking of her when I was a teenager," he volunteered.) In the living room, there were framed drawings by his favorite cartoonists—Chris Ware, Richard Corben, and Robert Crumb,

among others—and a collection of electric guitars. By the window stood a pot with three cacti: two short, one long, in the shape of a penis and testicles, a gift from his friend the actor Vincent Lacoste, the star of “Les Beaux Gosses.” Sattouf said he had been reading Chateaubriand but that he mostly reads comic books. The only book about the Middle East that I could see was one on Islam by Bernard Lewis. It was still in shrink-wrap.

The day was hot, and the smoky fragrance of ham wafted up from a restaurant downstairs. “Ah, *putain*, it stinks!” Sattouf screamed, running to shut the window. He picked up a toy gun, a “Blade Runner” prop: “I’m gonna kill someone!”

Usually, Sattouf speaks in a soft, rather delicate voice; he told me that when he makes a reservation at a restaurant he lowers his voice so that he’s not mistaken for a woman. It struck me that there was perhaps a compensatory element to his penchant for adolescent sexual humor. He is a short and compact man, with wire-rimmed glasses, a closely trimmed beard, and somewhat stubby arms that make him look like a cartoon character. Whenever he felt cornered by my questions, which was often, he would cross his arms and glare at me, in a parody of machismo.

Although Sattouf’s work is confessional, in person he is guarded; even his closest friends describe him as secretive. When I first contacted him by e-mail, he warned me that he would not reveal anything that he might discuss in the projected third and fourth volumes of “The Arab of the Future.” That turned out to include most of the events in his life from the age of seven on.

Furthermore, what Sattouf does say about himself can be highly contradictory. In interviews, he has said that he wrote “The Arab of the Future” out of a desire for “revenge” when France declined to provide him with visas for relatives who were trapped in Homs, under siege by the Syrian Army. But, when I asked him about this episode, he would say only that one of his relatives succeeded in getting to France, while the others found refuge in an Arab country that he refused to name. When I asked for the real names of



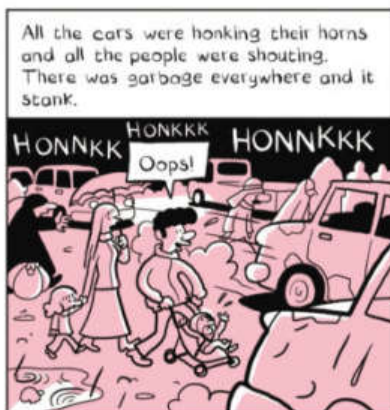
Sattouf’s memoir uses different “colors of emotion” for the places where he grew up.

his parents, he pretended to spot an attractive woman at another table: “Look at those titties!” He told me that his father died in Syria sometime in the first years of this century, but would not give a date. He said that his younger brother works as an engineer in Boulogne but that “you will never know anything else about him! I’m not a family guy. Are you a family guy? Tell me about you, Adam. Do you like being with your family?” He responded to follow-up questions by e-mail with a GIF of Tom Cruise in “Top Gun” smiling mischievously and saying, “It’s classified.”

A number of rumors about Sattouf

have circulated in the press and on Wikipedia (which, until recently, claimed that he grew up partly in Algeria). He turned out to be the source for at least some of them. He had told various people I interviewed that his father kidnapped his brother and took him back to Syria, where the brother later joined the uprising against Assad; that his father had a mystical epiphany while making the hajj to Mecca; and that he later committed a terrible crime against the family. When I asked him about these stories in an e-mail, he denied them, joking that his father had “obviously been kidnapped by extraterrestrials one day before meeting





France is gray-blue; Libya is yellow; Syria, where he spent a decade, is a pinkish red.

my mother but I prefer that you not talk about this in your article." He went on to say that his brother never returned to Syria; his father barely went to the mosque, much less to Mecca; and there was never a crime against the family. "The reality is much less sexy than you think," he wrote.

"I'm a little paranoid," Sattouf admitted at one point. A French-Lebanese friend of mine, the screenwriter Joëlle Touma, attributed this to his childhood in Syria. "If you grow up in a dictatorship like Syria, you want to control everything, because you're afraid that if you don't, and you say one wrong word, you could end up in jail." But I sensed

that there were other motives at work. Though false, the kidnapping story was curiously apt. In Sattouf's memoir, his father's decision to move the family to Syria has the coercive force of a kidnapping. The book is, in part, a settling of accounts with the man who stole his childhood, a man he once worshipped but came to despise.

As a teen-ager in Brittany, Sattouf spent almost all of his time in his room, drawing and reading comic books. After getting his *baccalauréat*, he studied applied art in Nantes, and then made his way to Paris to study animation at the Gobelins School of

the Image. His early drawings were hyperrealist, feverishly detailed and painterly: he compared them, somewhat dismissively, to swaggeringly virtuosic guitar solos. He landed his first contract in 1998—"before I had even kissed a girl."

Émile Bravo, a comic-book artist who is a close friend of Sattouf's, met him at a conference in 2002. He remembers Sattouf, he told me, as "very timid and introverted, but with a great sense of humor." He went on, "Riad had a great analysis of people, a feeling for psychology. He seemed to have an enormous tableau of the characters in the human comedy." The son of refugees from Franco's Spain, Bravo was a kindred spirit; like Sattouf, he had spent his childhood shuttling between France and a rural village under dictatorship, and he knew what it was like to feel permanently out of place. According to Sattouf, it was Bravo who gave him the confidence to begin writing his own stories.

Through Bravo, Sattouf befriended other cartoonists, and joined a studio of young artists who aimed to write comic books for a more sophisticated literary readership. He stayed there until last year, when he set up a studio at home. His first works were variations on the theme of male sexual frustration, often his own. In "No Sex in New York," inspired by a trip he made there not long after 9/11, he depicts himself as a schlemiel with an inconvenient Muslim name, a natural-born loser in a ruthlessly competitive sexual marketplace.

Mathieu Sapin, one of Sattouf's studio mates, told me, "In a very short time, Riad imposed himself as a figure with a set of themes all his own—youth, education, sexual frustration, the things we see in Daniel Clowes, but in a French style." When readers told Sattouf to "stop with your stories of losers," he invented a buff, bisexual superhero named Pascal Brutal. "I'm fascinated by the desire that women have for stronger men—that's where my sexual frustration came from," Sattouf told me. Switching to English, he added, "I'm weak, you know, I'm not virile! I hate muscular people. I should go to the gym, but I'm too lazy!"

Almost all of Sattouf's work is

drawn from firsthand observation. “Riad is a sponge,” the comic-book artist Jul Berjeaut told me. “He can leave aside his own sensibility and absorb the sensibility of those around him.” For his first popular hit, “Retour au Collège” (“Back to School”), published in 2005, Sattouf spent two weeks embedded in an upper-class high school in Paris. The principal boasted that in his school you didn’t hear students saying “Go fuck your mother,” but Sattouf heard much worse, and spared none of the details. A portrait of the children of France’s ruling class, “Retour au Collège” is at once affectionate and sneering, gross and touching: a Sattouf signature.

Sattouf brought the same sensibility to his strip for *Charlie Hebdo*, “The Secret Life of Youth,” which appeared weekly from 2004 until late 2014. It was based on conversations he overheard in the Métro, in fast-food restaurants, and on the street. “I never took notes, and I always changed the looks of the people I drew,” he told me. He showed me his method one day while we were riding the Métro. A little girl began talking to her mother, and a look of intense concentration came over Sattouf’s face. The girl’s mother asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. She replied, “I want to be a giraffe so that I can observe everyone below.” That would have been an unusually gentle “Secret Life,” however. Many of his *Charlie* strips involved scenes of humiliation, often of a sexual nature, and of religious hypocrisy. In one strip, a woman complains that she can no longer wear her miniskirt to work because she’s being hit on by Islamists praying outside her office. Urban life, for Sattouf, is a deeply unsentimental education, an al-fresco hazing. “I think Riad believes the world around him is really scary on a daily basis,” Berjeaut said.

“The Secret Life” established Sattouf as a distinctively sour comedian of manners—and, more controversially, as the only Arab cartoonist for *Charlie Hebdo*, whose mockery of religion took aim at symbols of Islamic piety, notably the image of the Prophet. In 2006, *Charlie Hebdo* reprinted the cartoons of the Prophet that had run in a right-wing Danish newspaper. In

## THE EXORCISM

O reasonably well-known driver  
of the overrated light-blue convertible,  
why do you bend machetes with your gray eyes?

There’s stagefright in the way you take left turns.

When you pout, you spill dark thoughts in a pot.

I suspect you come from the line  
of Baskervilles, post-dog.

—

Commission or no commission,  
your paintings are full of spiders.

You measure poltergeists in your home  
to predict the shrinking of St. Kilda’s sheep.

A distracted Charon,  
retired from Lethe,  
always picks up the ashes of your diary.

—

November, 2011, it published a special issue, *Charia Hebdo*, guest-edited by the Prophet; the offices were fire-bombed just as it hit the newsstands. After the January, 2015, massacre, Sapin told me, “I was very afraid for Riad.”

Yet Sattouf’s relationship with *Charlie* was never close: it was a professional alliance, not a political one. Although he was fond of Stéphane Charbonnier (Charb), Jean Cabut (Cabu), Rénald Luzier (Luz), and Georges Wolinski—legendary figures in the world of French cartooning, all of whom were murdered on January 7th—he did not attend editorial meetings, because he didn’t feel that he could contribute to the often raucous arguments about French politics. Nor was he attracted to *Charlie*’s style of deliberately confrontational satire. Although he is a wry observer of human folly, he said that he could not bring himself to “draw something openly mocking.” He told me that he wasn’t sure whether it was responsible

to reprint the Danish cartoons but that he “found them very badly done as drawings.” Drawing the Prophet, he said, “is a personal taboo. My cousins and I used to talk about what he might look like, but I wouldn’t do it. I’ve never drawn Jesus, Buddha, or Moses, either.”

In the first issue of *Charlie* published after the massacre, Sattouf revived his “Secret Life” strip. He drew a scene he had observed near his apartment: a piece of understated yet pointed reportage. A young, working-class man of North African background, with a shaved head and wearing a parka and sneakers, speaks in thick *banlieue* slang on his cell phone, often with his back to us. We can’t hear what the other person is saying, but he seems to be either belittling the atrocities or hinting that they were part of a larger conspiracy. The man we actually hear, growing increasingly testy, replies, “I don’t give a fuck about Charlie Hebdo,” but “you don’t kill someone for that, that’s all.”

This was a widespread conviction



A carillon rings in your head,  
and you resent its sound  
but enjoy the slow-boil resentment.

Even your mellow dog digs a good bone to pick.

—

I saw you on Brighton Beach the day after Christmas,  
just as you came out of the water.

And yet we react in the same way  
to the draft that makes toes curl  
on time-warping winter evenings.

—

Forget where you're going.  
Dress all in white,  
close your eyes,  
say something to the film crew outside your apartment.

There's no duel on your schedule tomorrow.  
You'll be O.K.

Look: a new diner has opened just down the block.

—Anton Yakovlev

among French citizens of Muslim origin, but it found little echo in the French press during the weeks after the massacre, when the slogan “Je Suis Charlie,” which began as an expression of solidarity, became something of a test of loyalty—a “ritual formula,” as the sociologist Emmanuel Todd has argued. According to Todd, those who refused to abide by this formula—particularly if they were Muslim—were susceptible to accusations that they excused or even condoned the killings. Muslims, Todd has written, found themselves pressured to defend not merely “the *right*, but the *obligation*, to commit blasphemy,” as proof of their commitment to French secularism. Sattouf’s cartoon was a quiet reminder that there were French citizens—many of them Muslim—who were outraged by the massacre, without being sympathetic to *Charlie*.

One day, as we were walking across a bridge over the Seine, I asked Sattouf how he felt after the attacks. “I was totally disoriented,” he said. “If

you were a cartoonist associated with *Charlie*, you were suddenly expected to be an expert on geopolitics. At the same time, you felt a little guilty, as if you’d started a war. And what was even weirder was that *Charlie* was being described by people like Emmanuel Todd



as this right-wing magazine. My memory of *Charlie* was of Charb going to demonstrations in factories where people were on strike, and shouting, ‘Down with the bosses!’, singing the ‘Internationale,’ and making free drawings for the workers. It was utterly confusing.” Sattouf marched in the January 11th demonstration, when four million French people gathered across the

country with “Je Suis Charlie” banners, but the spectacle of patriotic unity—something with which he was all too familiar, from his childhood in Syria—left him feeling uncomfortable. “Netanyahu, Abbas, all the heads of state, French people singing the ‘Marseillaise’: I think Cabu and the others would have been traumatized if they’d seen the demonstration—horrified, really. It had nothing to do with the journal or the people I knew there, who detested nationalism.”

Sattouf had long considered writing a book about the Arab world, but the idea for the memoir occurred to him only after the Syrian uprising broke out, in 2011. “I was certain everything was going to collapse,” he told me. “I knew Syria would never be like the other Arab countries. I’d seen teachers beating their children in school. I knew how things worked there. It was instinctive.” He wrote the book in “a kind of trance,” he told me, drawing almost exclusively on memory. He read no histories of Syria, barely looked at family photographs, and imposed a rule on himself: never to stray from his childhood perspective, and to write only about what he knew at the time. When the Sattouf family visits the ruins of Palmyra, there is no mention of its notorious prison, which was destroyed by the Islamic State last May, because Sattouf’s father never mentioned it, and Sattouf wanted to “convey the ignorance of childhood.” The events that reshaped Syria—the death of Hafez al-Assad, the rise of his son Bashar, the uprising and the civil war—are never even hinted at in the first two volumes, which cover the years 1978–85. The effect of this omission is one of time travel, back to the vanished future of pan-Arabism.

When I spoke to Guillaume Allary, Sattouf’s editor, he described the book as a work of almost pure testimony. “The Arab of the Future,” he said, gives the reader “the raw facts,” untainted by any “political discourse.” But Sattouf’s choice of facts is selective, and it would be hard to read “The Arab of the Future” as anything other than a bitter indictment of the pan-Arabist project that his father espoused. Little Riad, its apparently guileless narrator,

is a Candide figure, who can't help noticing the rot around him, even as the adults invoke the glories of Arab socialism. "The Arab of the Future" provides an unflinching portrait of the frustrations and the brutality that sparked the revolts against the regimes in both Libya and Syria—and of the internal conflicts that have darkened their revolutionary horizons.

That portrait has made "The Arab of the Future" a very popular book among Arab exiles and expatriates in France. I spoke to a number of Syrian intellectuals in Paris; all of them vouched for the accuracy of Sattouf's depiction of Baathist Syria, whatever their views about the current war. Subhi Hadidi, a leftist member of the opposition who fled Syria in the late eighties, told me, "Sattouf is faithful to what he sees, and he doesn't beautify reality." (He had visited Sattouf's village and found it "full of militants—Com-

munist, Trotskyists, and Muslim Brothers.") When I asked the Syrian-Lebanese poet Adonis, who has been more critical of the rebels than of the regime, what he thought of Sattouf, he said, "Sattouf describes things as they are." I had dinner with a group of Algerian intellectuals who grew up in socialist Algeria, under the rule of Colonel Houari Boumédiène, and who told me that Sattouf might as well have been writing about their childhood.

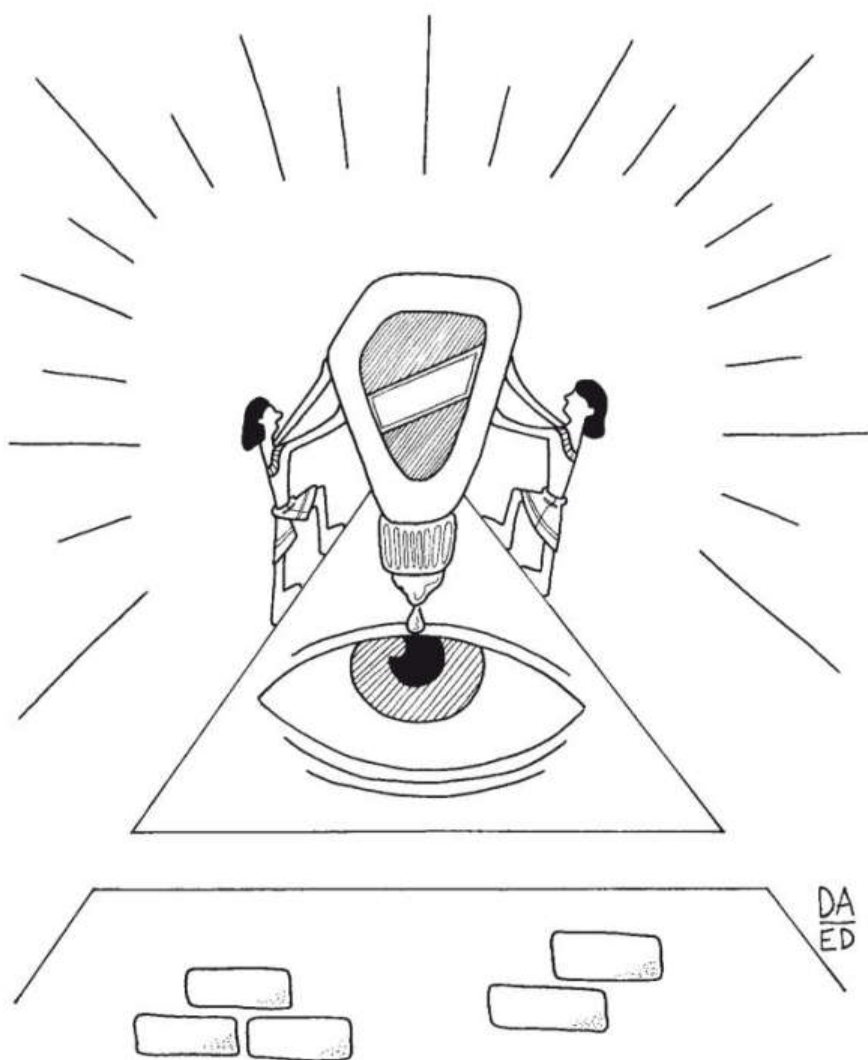
Among French intellectuals, however, particularly those who study the Arab world, Sattouf is a more controversial figure. Many note that his bleak and unflattering depiction of a traditional Muslim society comes at a time when the defense of *laïcité*, the French model of secularism, has increasingly assumed anti-Muslim undertones, and when the far-right National Front was able to beat all other parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections, with

nearly twenty-five per cent of the vote.

In a lacerating critique for the Web site Orient XXI, published two weeks after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, Laurent Bonnefoy, a young Middle East scholar, argued that Sattouf's book had seduced French readers by pandering to Orientalist prejudices: "The Arab is dirty . . . violent, backwards, always stupid, vulgar, bigoted, and, of course, anti-Semitic." The Bonnefoy thesis was widely discussed in Paris, and I heard echoes of it in a number of conversations. Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, a French scholar of the Arab world, told me that the book's appeal in France "rests on an unconscious, or partly conscious, racism," paraphrasing Emmanuel Todd's thesis about *Charlie*. "There's nothing positive in the book—no nostalgia or love," he said. "Even my Arab friends who eat the Arabs for breakfast have a certain nostalgia for the sun, the nights on the terrace, the countryside." He characterized Sattouf as an "*arabe de services*"—a token Arab. He went on, "Because he's part Arab, everything he says becomes acceptable, including the most atrociously racist things. What he's written is very personal, a kind of self-analysis, really. But this analysis has entered a very public arena, in a totally explosive context that's much larger than he is."

But plenty of French Arabists take Sattouf's side. Jean-Pierre Filiu, who has written extensively on Syria, believes that Sattouf's success is a tribute to a French "empathy for the plight of real-life Arabs, rather than the 'Arabs of the future' envisioned by Qaddafi and Assad." Olivier Roy, a French authority on Islam, told me that Sattouf can't help being "enlisted" in local battles, simply because he's one of the few artists of Muslim origin who have achieved fame in France. "Sattouf is experiencing something that Marjane Satrapi experienced after 'Persepolis' came out," he said. "She told a story of dictatorship and revolution, and suddenly she was expected to be an activist."

I mentioned the controversy to Elias Sanbar, a Palestinian writer and diplomat, who is now Palestine's ambassador to UNESCO. He has been living in Paris on and off since the sixties, and is a sharp observer of France's relationship to the Arab world. "I'm not





surprised they're calling it an Orientalist book, but it's a false debate," he said. "The problem isn't Sattouf, who has written a funny and sympathetic book. It's the readers who think they've understood a society as complex as Syria because they've read a single comic book." Until the current war, he said, "Syria was a black hole, an Atlantis, in France. It took hundreds of thousands of deaths, a human disaster, for the French to open their eyes. And in this context arrived a book—humorous, humane—that all of a sudden gave the French the illusion of knowing a country."

Sattouf himself seemed to want people to read as little into his work as possible and insisted that his project was to write about his childhood in a remote village, not about Syria, much less about the Arab world. "If I had written a book about a village in southern Italy or Norway, would I be asked about my vision of the European world?" he said. "This idea of the Arab world is a mirage, really." Perhaps it is. Yet that mirage, which Sattouf's father mistook for the future, is the subject of the memoir. And Sattouf didn't call the book "The Boy from Ter Maaleh"; he called it "The Arab of the Future."

On the first day that we met, Sattouf took me to lunch at Les Comptoirs de Carthage, a canteen in the Marais owned by Kate Daoud, an Englishwoman in her sixties who married a Tunisian and lived in Tunisia for many years before settling in Paris. Kate's Cuisine, as regulars like Sattouf call it, is a quiet, rustic place with wood tables and turquoise placemats, decorated with North African bric-a-brac and photographs. I ordered a vegetable couscous; he ordered a salad. When we paid the bill, I complimented Daoud on her harissa, and Sattouf asked her when she left Tunisia. She said that she sold her house there only after the uprising against the Ben-Ali dictatorship, when the security situation deteriorated. "Are you Tunisian?" she asked him.

The question seemed to startle Sattouf. He told me that because he did not have stereotypically Arab features he was rarely seen as such. His appear-



*"I don't need to write it down, boss, I'm wearing a wire."*

ance had insulated him from overt racism in France, his sole experience of which was when, after winning an important comics prize in 2010, he received letters calling him a "dirty Arab." He said that the very word "Arab" had become highly charged in France; now that the pan-Arabist project is no more, it is purely a racial epithet: "'Arab' is a word you only hear from racists, as in 'Ah, those Arabs!'" In that sense, the title "The Arab of the Future" has what the sociologist Eric Fassin characterized as "a nostalgic air": "People in France don't talk about Arabs; they talk about Muslims."

In one of our early conversations, Sattouf described his father as having had a "complicated attraction-repulsion relationship to the West." It often seemed that Sattouf's relationship to his roots was just as conflicted. The more he tried to minimize his interest in the Arab world, the more he talked about it, usually in the form of comic riffs. When I rescheduled a meeting with a wealthy Algerian busi-

nessman, Sattouf said, "Don't go back to Algeria for the next forty years! If you do, someone at the airport is going to say to you, 'Please come this way, sir.' Ten years later, you will have a great article for *The New Yorker* about life in an Algerian prison. And then you will have great success. *Al-hamdu lil-lab!* That will teach you never to insult an Algerian businessman!"

Sattouf shares another trait with his father: a sense of destiny. In "The Arab of the Future," the visual marker of that destiny is his blond hair, the color of his mother's. The son of Abdel-Razak Sattouf was raised to become the Arab of the future; instead, he became a Frenchman with a "weird name." That made him a misfit in France, but it also gave him the subject of a lifetime. In the next volume of "The Arab of the Future," Sattouf told me, he'll be writing about an experience no less harrowing than his childhood in Ter Maaleh: his adolescence in France. "People will be surprised," he said. "I saw some pretty tough things here." ♦

# Cold Little Bird

B E N   M A R C U S





It started with bedtime. A coldness. A formality.

Martin and Rachel tucked the boy in, as was their habit, then stooped to kiss him good night.

"Please don't do that," he said, turning to face the wall.

They took it as teasing, flopped onto his bed to nuzzle and tickle him.

The boy turned rigid, endured the cuddle, then barked out at them, "I really don't like that!"

"Jonah?" Martin said, sitting up.

"I don't want your help at bedtime anymore," he said. "I'm not a baby. You have Lester. Go cuddle with him."

"Sweetheart," Rachel said. "We're not helping you. We're just saying good night. You like kisses, right? Don't you like kisses and cuddles? You big silly."

Jonah hid under the blankets. A classic pout. Except that he wasn't a pouter, he wasn't a hider. He was a reserved boy who generally took a scientific interest in the tantrums and emotional extravagances of other children, marvelling at them as though they were some strange form of street theatre.

Martin tried to tickle the blanketed lump of person that was his son. He didn't know what part of Jonah he was touching. He just dug at him with a stiff hand, thinking a laugh would come out, some sound of pleasure. It used to work. One stab of the finger and the kid exploded with giggles. But Jonah didn't speak, didn't move.

"We love you so much. You know?" Martin said. "So we like to show it. It feels good."

"Not to me. I don't feel that way."

"What way? What do you mean?"

They sat with him, perplexed, and tried to rub his back, but he'd rolled to the edge of the bed, nearly flattening himself against the wall.

"I don't love you," Jonah said.

"Oh, now," Martin said. "You're just tired. No need to say that sort of stuff. Get some rest."

"You told me to tell the truth, and I'm telling the truth. I. Don't. Love. You."

This happened. Kids tested their attachments. They tried to push you away to see just how much it would take to really lose you. As a parent, you took the blow, even sharpened the knife yourself before handing it to the little fiends,

who stepped right up and plunged. Or so Martin had heard.

They hovered by Jonah's bed, assuring him that it had been a long day—although the day had been entirely unremarkable—and he would feel better in the morning.

Martin felt like a robot saying these things. He felt like a robot thinking them. There was nothing to do but leave the boy there, let him sleep it off.

Downstairs, they cleaned the kitchen in silence. Rachel was troubled or not, he couldn't tell, and it was better not to check. In some way, Martin was captivated. If he were Jonah, ten years old and reasonably smart, starting to sniff out the world and find his angle, this might be something worth exploring. Getting rid of the soft, warm, dumb providers who spun opportunity around you relentlessly, answering your every need. Good play, Jonah. But how do you follow such a strong, definitive opening move? What now?

Over the next few weeks, Jonah stuck by his statement, wandering through their lives like some prisoner of war who'd been trained not to talk. He endured his parents, leaving for school in the morning with scarcely a goodbye. Upon coming home, he put away his coat and shoes, did his homework without prompting. He helped himself to snacks, dragging a chair into the kitchen so that he could climb on the counter. He got his own glass, filling it with water at the sink. When he was done eating, he loaded his dishes in the dishwasher. Martin, working from home in the afternoons, watched all this, impressed but bothered. He kept offering to help, but Jonah always said that he was fine, he could handle it. At bedtime, Martin and Rachel still fussed over Lester, who, at six years old, regressed and babified himself in order to drink up the extra attention. Jonah insisted on saying good night with no kiss, no hug. He shut his door and disappeared every night at 8 P.M.

When Martin or Rachel caught Jonah's eye, the boy forced a smile at them. But it was so obviously fake. Could a boy his age do that?

"Of course," Rachel said. "You think he doesn't know how to pretend?"

"No, I know he can pretend. But this seems different. I mean, to have to pretend that he's happy to see us. First of all, what the fuck is he so upset about? And, second, it just seems so kind of . . . grownup. In the worst possible way. A fake smile. It's a tool one uses with strangers."

"Well, I don't know. He's ten. He has social skills. He can hide his feelings. That's not such an advanced thing to do."

Martin studied his wife.

"O.K., so you think everything's fine?"

"I think maybe he's growing up and you don't like it."

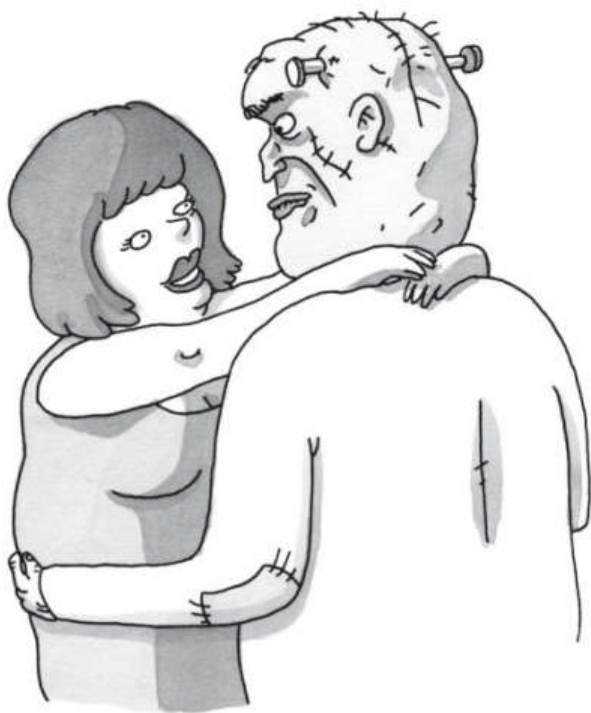
"And you like it? That's what you're saying? You like this?"

His voice had gone up. He had lost control for a minute there, and, as per motherfucking usual, it was a deal-breaker. Rachel put up her hand, and she was gone. From the other room, he heard her say, "I'm not going to talk to you when you're like this."

O.K., he thought. Goodbye. We'll talk some other time when I'm not like this, a.k.a. never.

Jonah, it turned out, reserved this behavior solely for his parents. A probing note to his teacher revealed nothing. He was fine in school, did not act withdrawn, had successfully led a team project on Antarctica, and seemed to run and play with his friends during recess. Run and play? What animal were they discussing here? Everybody loved Jonah was the verdict, along with some bullshit about how happy he seemed. "Seemed" was just the thing. Seemed! If you were an idiot who didn't know the boy, who had no grasp of human behavior.

At home, Jonah doted on his brother, read to him, played with him, even let Lester climb on his back for rides around the house, all fairly verboten in the old days, when Jonah's interest in Lester had only ever been theoretical. Lester was thrilled by it all. He suddenly had a new friend, the older brother he worshipped, who used to ignore him. Life was good. But to Martin it felt like a calculated display. With this performance of tenderness toward his brother, Jonah seemed to be saying, "Look, this is what you no



Kanin

*"You're a surprisingly good kisser for having two different dead guys' lips."*

longer get. See? It's over for you. Go fuck yourself."

Martin took it too personally, he knew. Maybe because it was personal.

One night, when Jonah hadn't touched his dinner, they were asking him if he would like something else to eat, and, because he wasn't answering, and really had not been answering for some weeks now, other than in one-word responses, curt and formal, Martin and Rachel abandoned their usual rules, the guideposts of parenting they'd clung to, and moved through a list of bribes. They dangled the promise of ice cream, and then those monstrosities passing for Popsicles, shaped like animals with chocolate faces or hats, which used to turn Jonah craven and desperate. When Jonah remained silent and sort of washed-out looking, Martin offered his son candy. He could have some right now. If only he'd fucking say something.

"It's just that you're all in his face," Rachel said to him later. "How's he supposed to breathe?"

"You think my desire for him to speak is making him silent?"

"It's probably not helping."

"Whereas your approach is so amazing."

"My approach? You mean being his mother? Loving him for who he is? Keeping him safe? Yeah, it is pretty amazing."

He turned over to sleep while Rachel clipped on her book light.

They'd ride this one out in silence, apparently.

Yes, well. They'd written their own vows, promising to be "intensely honest" with each other. They had not specifically said that they would hold up each other's flaws to the most rigorous scrutiny, calling out each other's smallest mistakes, like fact checkers, believing, perhaps, that the marriage would thrive only if all personal errors and misdeeds were rooted out of it. This mission had gone unstated.

**I**n the morning, when Martin got up, Jonah sat reading while Lester played soldiers on the rug. Lester was fully dressed, his backpack near the door. There was no possible way that

Lester had done this on his own. Obviously, Jonah had dressed his brother, emptied the boy's backpack of yesterday's crap art from the first-grade praise farm he attended, and readied it for a new day. Months ago, they'd asked Jonah to perform this role in the morning, to dress and prepare his brother, so that they could sleep in, and Jonah had complied a few times, but half-heartedly, with a certain mysterious cost to little Lester, who was often speechless and tear-streaked by the time they found him. The chore had quickly lapsed, and usually Martin awoke to a hungry, half-naked Lester, waiting for his help.

Today, Lester seemed happy. There was no sign of crying.

"Good morning, Daddy," he said.

"Hello there, Les, my friend. Sleep O.K.?"

"Jonah made me breakfast. I had juice and Cheerios. I brought in my own dishes."

"Way to go! Thank you."

Martin figured he'd just play it casual, not draw too much attention to anything.

"Good morning, champ," he said to Jonah. "What are you reading?"

Martin braced himself for silence, for stillness, for a child who hadn't heard or who didn't want to answer. But Jonah looked at him.

"It's a book called 'The Short.' It's a novel," he said, and then he resumed reading.

A fat bolt of lightning filled the cover. A boy ran beneath it. The title lettering was achieved graphically with one long wire, a plug trailing off the cover.

"Oh, yeah?" Martin said. "What's it about? Tell me about it."

There was a long pause this time. Martin went into the kitchen to get his coffee started. He popped back out to the living room and snapped his fingers.

"Jonah, hello. Your book. What's it about?"

Jonah spoke quietly. His little flannel shirt was buttoned up to the collar, as if he were headed out into a blizzard. Martin almost heard a kind of apology in his voice.

"Since I have to leave for school in fifteen minutes, and since I was hoping



to get to page 100 this morning, would it be O.K. if I didn't describe it to you? You can look it up on Amazon."

He told Rachel about this later in the morning, the boy's unsettling calm, his odd response.

"Yeah, I don't know," she said. "I mean, good for him, right? He just wanted to read, and he told you that. So what?"

"Huh," Martin said.

Rachel was busy cleaning. She hadn't looked at him. Their argument last night had either been forgotten or stored for later activation. He'd find out. She seemed engrossed by a panicked effort at tidying, as if guests were arriving any second, as if their house were going to be inspected by the fucking U.N. Martin followed her around while they talked, because if he didn't she'd roam out of earshot and the conversation would expire.

"He just seems like a stranger to me," Martin said, trying to add a lightness to his voice so she wouldn't hear it as a complaint.

Rachel stopped cleaning. "Yeah."

For a moment, it seemed that she might agree with him and they'd see this thing similarly.

"But he's not a stranger. I don't know. He's growing up. You should be happy that he's reading. At least he wasn't begging to be on the stupid iPad, and it seems like he's talking again. He wanted to read, and you're freaking out. Honestly."

Yes, well. You had these creatures in your house. You fed them. You cleaned them. And here was the person you'd made them with. She was beautiful, probably. She was smart, probably. It was impossible to know anymore. He looked at her through an unclear filter, for sure. He could indulge a great anger toward her that would suddenly vanish if she touched his hand. What was wrong? He'd done something or he hadn't done something. Figure it the fuck out, Martin thought. Root out the resentment. Apologize so hard it leaks from her body. Then drink the liquid. Or use it in a soup. Whatever.

Jonah came and went, such a weird bird of a boy, so serious. Martin tried to tread lightly. He tried not to tread at all. Better to float overhead, to allow the cold remoteness of his elder son

to freeze their home. He studied Rachel's caution, her distance-giving, her respect, the confidence she possessed that he clearly lacked, even as he saw the toll it took on her, what had become of this person who needed to touch her young son and just couldn't.

Then, one afternoon, he forgot himself. He came home with groceries and saw Jonah down on the rug with Lester, setting up his Lego figures for him, such an impossibly small person, dressed so carefully by his own hand, his son—it still seemed ridiculous and a miracle to Martin that there'd be such a thing as a son, that a little creature in this world would be his to protect and befriend. Without thinking about it, he sat down next to Jonah and took the whole of the boy in his arms. He didn't want to scare him, and he didn't want to hurt him, but he needed this boy to feel what it was like to be held, to really be swallowed up in a father's arms. Maybe he could squeeze all the aloofness out of the boy, just choke it out until it was gone.

Jonah gave nothing back. He went limp, and the hug didn't work the way Martin had hoped. You couldn't do it alone. The person being hugged had to do something, to be something. The person being hugged had to fucking exist. And whoever this was, whoever he was holding, felt like nothing.

Finally, Martin released him, and Jonah straightened his hair. He did not look happy.

"I know that you and Mom are in charge and you make the rules," Jonah said. "But even though I'm only ten, don't I have a right not to be touched?"

The boy sounded so reasonable.

"You do," Martin said. "I apologize."

"I keep asking, but you don't listen."

"I listen."

"You don't. Because you keep doing it. So does Mom. You want to treat me like a stuffed animal, and I don't want to be treated like that."

"No, I don't, buddy."

"I don't want to be called buddy. Or mister. Or champ. I don't do that to you. You wouldn't want me always inventing some new ridiculous name for you."

"O.K." Martin put up his hands in surrender. "No more nicknames. I promise. It's just that you're my son and

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I like to hug you. We like to hug you.”

“I don’t want you to anymore. And I’ve said that.”

“Well, too bad,” Martin said, laughing, and, as if to prove he was right, he grabbed Lester, and Lester squealed with delight, squirming in his father’s arms.

Do you see how this used to work? Martin wanted to say to Jonah. This was you once, this was us.

Jonah seemed genuinely puzzled. “It doesn’t matter to you that I don’t like it?”

“It matters, but you’re wrong. You can be wrong, you know. You’ll die, without affection. I’m not kidding. You will actually dry up and die.”

Again, he found he had to explain love to this boy, to detail what it was like when you felt a desperate connection with someone else, how you wanted to hold that person and just crush him with hugs. But as Martin fought through the difficult and ridiculous discussion, he felt as if he were having a conversation with a lawyer. A lawyer, a scold, a little prick of a person. Whom he wanted to hug less and less. Maybe it’d be simpler just to give Jonah what he wanted. What he thought he wanted.

Jonah seemed pensive, concerned. “Does any of that make sense to you?” Martin asked.

“It’s just that I’d rather not say things that could hurt someone,” Jonah said.

“Well . . . that’s good. That’s how you should feel.”

“I’d rather not have to say anything about you and Mom. At school. To Mr. Fourenay.”

Mr. Fourenay was what they called a “feelings doctor.” He was paid, certainly not very much, to take the kids and their feelings very, very seriously. Martin and Rachel had trouble taking *him* seriously. He looked like a man who had subsisted, for a very long time, on a strict diet of the feelings of children. Gutted, wasted, and soft.

“Jonah, what are you talking about?”

“About you touching me when I don’t want you to. I don’t want to have to mention that to anyone at school. I really don’t.”

Martin stood up. It was as if a hand had moved inside him.

He stared at Jonah, who held his gaze patiently, waiting for an answer.

“Message received. I’ll discuss it with Mom.”

“Thank you.”

Without really thinking about it, Martin had crafted an adulthood that was essentially friendless. There were, of course, the friends of the marriage, who knew him only as part of a couple—the dour, rotten part—and thus they were ruled out for anything remotely candid, like a confession of what the fuck had just gone down in his own home. Before the children came, he’d managed, sometimes erratically, to maintain preposterous phone relationships with several male friends. Deep, searching, facially sweaty conversations on the phone with other semi-articulate, vaguely unhappy men. In general, these friendships had heated up and found their purpose around a courtship or a breakup, when an aria of complaint or desire could be harmonized by some pathetic accomplice. But after Jonah was born, and then Lester, phone calls with friends had become out of the question. There was just never a time when it was O.K., or even appealing, to talk on the phone. When he was home, he was in shark mode, cruising slowly and brutally through the house,

cleaning and clearing, scrubbing food from rugs, folding and storing tiny items of clothing, and, if no one was looking, occasionally stopping at his laptop to see if his prospects had suddenly been lifted by some piece of tremendous fortune, de-

livered via e-mail. When he finally came to rest, in a barf-covered chair, he was done for the night. He poured several beers, in succession, right onto his pleasure center, which could remain dry and withered no matter what came soaking down.

The gamble of a friendless adulthood, whether by accident or design, was that your partner would step up to the role. She for you, and you for her.

But when Martin thought about

Jonah’s threat—blackmail, really—he knew he couldn’t tell Rachel. In a certain light, the only light that mattered, he was in the wrong. The instructions were already out that they were not to get all huggy with Jonah, and here he’d gone and done it anyway. Rachel would just ask him what he had expected and why he was surprised that Jonah had lashed out at him for not respecting his boundaries.

So, yeah, maybe, maybe that was all true. But there was the other part. The threat that came out of the boy. The quiet force of it. To even mention that Jonah had threatened to report them for touching him ghosted an irreversible suspicion into people’s minds. You couldn’t talk about it. You couldn’t mention it. It seemed better to not even think it, to do the work that would begin to block such an event from memory.

The boys were talking quietly on the couch one afternoon a few days later. Martin was in the next room, and he caught the sweet tones, the two voices he loved, that he couldn’t even bear. For a minute he forgot what was going on and listened to the life he’d helped make. They were speaking like little people, not kids, back and forth, a real discussion. Jonah was explaining something to Lester, and Lester was asking questions, listening patiently. It was heartbreaking.

He snuck out to see the boys on the couch, Lester cuddled up against his older brother, who had a big book in his hands. A grownup one. On the cover, instead of a boy dashing beneath a bolt of lightning, were the good old Twin Towers. The title, “Lies,” was glazed in blood, which dripped down the towers themselves.

Oh, motherfucking hell.

“What’s this?” Martin asked. “What are you reading there?”

“A book about 9/11. Who caused it.”

Martin grabbed it, thumbed the pages. “Where’d you get it?”

“From Amazon. With my birthday gift card.”

“Hmm. Do you believe it?”

“What do you mean? It’s true.”

“What’s true?”

“That the Jews caused 9/11 and they all stayed home that day so they wouldn’t get killed.”





Martin excused Lester. Told him to skedaddle and, yes, it was O.K. to watch TV, even though watching time hadn't started yet. Just go, go.

"O.K., Jonah," he whispered. "Jonah, stop. This is not O.K. Not at all O.K. First of all, Jonah, you have to listen to me. This is insane. This is a book by an insane person."

"You know him?"

"No, I don't know him. I don't have to. Listen to me, you know that we're Jewish, right? You, me, Mom, Lester. We're Jewish."

"Not really."

"What do you mean, not really?"

"You don't go to synagogue. You don't seem to worship. You never talk about it."

"That's not all that matters."

"Last month was Yom Kippur and you didn't fast. You didn't go to services. You don't ever say Happy New Year on Rosh Hashanah."

"Those are rituals. You don't need to observe them to be part of the faith."

"But do you know anything about it?"

"9/11?"

"No, being Jewish. Do you know what it means and what you're supposed to believe and how you're supposed to act?"

"I do, yes. I have a pretty good idea."

"Then tell me."

"Jonah."

"What? I'm just wondering how you can call yourself Jewish."

"How? Are you fucking kidding me?"

He needed to walk away before he did something.

"O.K., Jonah, it's actually really simple. I'll tell you how. Because everyone else in the world would call me Jewish. With no debate. None. Because of my parents and their parents, and their parents, including whoever got turned to dust in the war. Zayde Anshel's whole family. You walk by their picture every day in the hall. Do you think you're not related to them? And because I was called a kike in junior high school, and high school, and college, and probably beyond that, right up to this fucking day. And because if they started rounding up Jews again they'd take one look at our name and they'd know. And that's you, too,

mister. They would come for us and kill us. O.K.? You."

He was shaking his fist in his son's face. Just old-school shouting. He wanted to do more. He wanted to tear something apart. There was no safe way to behave right now.

"They would kill you. And you'd be dead. You'd die."

"Martin?" Rachel said. "What's going on?"

Of course. There she was. Lurking. He had no idea how long she'd been standing there, what she'd heard.

Martin wasn't done. Jonah seemed fascinated, his eyes wide as his father ranted.

"Even if you said that you hated Jews, too, and that Jews were evil and caused all the suffering in the world, they would look at you and know for sure that you were Jewish, for sure! Buddy, champ, mister"—just spitting these names at his son—"because only a Jew, they would say, only a Jew would betray his own people like that."

Jonah looked at him. "I understand," he said. He didn't seem shaken. He didn't seem disturbed. Had he heard? How could he really understand?

The boy picked up the book and thumbed through it.

"This is just a different point of view. You always say that I should have an open mind, that I should think for myself. You say that to me all the time."

"Yes, I do. You're right." Martin was trembling.

"Then do I have your permission to keep reading it?"

"No, you absolutely don't. Not this time. Permission denied."

Rachel was shaking her head.

"Do you see what he's reading? Do you see it?" he shouted.

He waved the book at her, and she just looked at him with no expression at all.

After the kids were in bed, and the house had been quietly put back together, Rachel said they needed to talk.

Yes, we do, he thought, and about fucking time.

"Honestly," she said. "It's upsetting that he had that book, but the way you



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spoke to him? I don't want you going anywhere near him."

"Yeah, well, that's not for you to say. You're his mom, not mine. You want to file papers? You want to seek custody? Good luck, Mrs. Freeze. I'm his father. And you didn't hear it. You didn't hear it all. You have no fucking idea."

"I heard it, and I heard you. Martin, you need help. You're, I don't know, depressed. You're self-pitying. You think everything is some concerted attack on you. For the record, I am worried about Jonah. Really worried. Something is seriously wrong. There is no debate there. But you're just the worst possible partner in that worry—the fucking worst—because you make everything harder, and we can't discuss it without analyzing your bullshit feelings. You act wounded and hurt, and we're all supposed to feel sorry for you. For you! This isn't about you. So shut down the pity party already."

When this kind of talk came on, Martin knew to listen. This was the scold she'd been winding up for, and if he could endure it, and cop to it, there might be some release and clarity at the other end. A part of him found these outbursts from Rachel thrilling, and in some ways it was pos-

sible that he co-engineered them, without really thinking about it. Performed the sullen and narcissistic dance moves that, over time, would yield this kind of eruption from her. His wife was alive. She cared. Even if it seemed that she might sort of hate him.

He circled the house for a while, cooling off, letting the attack—no, no, the truth—settle. Any argument or even discussion to the contrary would just feed her point and read as the defensive bleating of a cornered man. Any speech, that is, except admission, contrition, and apology, the three horsemen.

Which was who he brought back into the room with him.

Rachel was in bed reading, eyes burned onto the page. She didn't seem even remotely ready to surrender her anger.

"Hey, listen," Martin said. "So I know you're mad, but I just want to say that I agree with everything you said. I'm scared and I'm worried and I'm sorry."

He let this settle. It needed to spread, to sink in. She needed to realize that he was agreeing with her.

It was hard to tell, but it seemed that some of her anger, with nothing to meet it, was draining out.

"And," he continued. He waited for her to look up, which she finally did. "You'll think I'm kidding, and I know you don't even want to hear this right now, but it's true, and I have to say it. It made me a little bit horny to hear all that."

She shook her head at the bad joke, which at least meant there was room to move here.

"Shut up," she said.

This was the way in. He took it.

"You shut up."

"Sorry to yell, Martin. I am. I just— This is so hard. I'm sorry."

She probably wasn't. This was simply the script back in, to the two of them united, and they both knew it. One day, one of them would choose not to play. It would be so easy not to say their lines.

"No, it's O.K.," he said to her, climbing onto the bed. "I get it. Listen, let's take the little motherfucker to the shop. Get him fixed. I'll call some doctors in the morning."

They hugged. An actual hug, between two consenting people. A novelty in this house.

"O.K.," she said. "I'm terrified. I don't know what's happening. I look at him and want so much to just grab him, but he's not there anymore. What has he done to himself?"

"Maybe he just needs minor surgery. Does that work on 9/11 truthers?"

"Oh, look," she said to him softly. "You're back. The real you. We missed you."

They talked a little and got up close to each other in bed. For a moment, their good feeling came on them—a version of it, anyway. It felt mild and transitory, but he would take it. It was nice. He was in bed with his wife, and they would figure this out.

"Listen," he said to her. "Do you want to just shag a pony right now, get back on track?"

"I don't know," she said. "I feel gross. I feel depressed."

"I feel gross, too. Let's do it. Two gross people licking each other's buttons."

She went to the bathroom and got the jar of enabler. They took their positions on the bed.

He hoped he could. He hoped he could. He hoped he could.

# EVERYDAY HOSPICE

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He was cold and insecure, so he left his shirt on. And his socks.

They used a cream. They used their hands. They used an object or two. During the brief strain of actual fornication they persisted with casual conversation about the next day's errands. In the early days of their marriage, this had seemed wicked and sexy, some ironic ballast against the animal greed. Now it just seemed efficient, and the animal greed no longer appeared. Minus the wet spot at the end, and the minor glow one occasionally felt, their sex wasn't so different from riding the subway.

It turned out that there was a deep arsenal of medical professionals who would be delighted to consult on the problem of a disturbed child. Angry, depressed, anxious, remote, bizarre. Even a Jew-hating Jewish child who might very well be dead inside. Only when his parents looked at him, though. Only when his parents spoke to him. Important parameter for the differential.

They zeroed in on recommendations with the help of a high-level participant in this world, a friend named Maureen, whose three exquisitely exceptional children had consumed, and spat back out, various kinds of psych services ever since they could walk. Each of the kids seemed to romance a different diagnosis every month, so Maureen had a pretty good idea of who fixed what and for how much goddam moolah.

When they told her, in pale terms, about Jonah, she, as a connoisseur of alienating behavior from the young, got excited.

"This is so 'The Fifth Child,'" she said. "Did you guys read that? I mean, you probably shouldn't read that. But did you? It's like a fiction novel. I don't think it really happened. But it's still fascinating."

Rachel had read it. Happy couple with four children and perfect life have fifth child, leading to less perfect life. Much, much, much, much less perfect. Sorrow, sorrow, sorrow, grief, and sorrow. Not really life at all.

"Yeah, but the kid in that book is a monster," Rachel said. "So heartless. He's not real. And he just wants to in-

flict pain. Jonah wouldn't hurt anyone. He wants to be alone. Or, not that, but. I don't know what Jonah wants. He's not violent, though. Or even mad. I don't think."

"All right, but he is hurting you, right?" Maureen said. "I mean, it seems like this is really causing you guys a lot of pain and suffering."

"I haven't read the book," Martin said. "But this isn't about us. This is about Jonah. His pain, his suffering. We just want to get to the bottom of it. To help him. To give him support."

In Rachel's silence he could feel her agreement and, maybe, her surprise that he would, or even could, think this way. He knew what to say now. He wasn't going to get burned again. But did he believe it? Was it true? He honestly didn't even know, and he wasn't so sure it mattered.

The doctor wanted to see them alone first. He said that it was his job to listen. So they talked, just dumped the thing out on the floor. It was ugly, Martin thought, but it was a rough picture of what was going down. The doctor scribbled away, stopping occasionally to look at them, to really deeply look at them, and nod. Since when had the act of listening turned into such a strange charade?

Then the doctor met with Jonah, to see for himself, pull evidence right from the culprit's mouth. Martin and Rachel sat in the waiting room and stared at the door. What would the doctor see? Which kid would he get? Were they crazy and was this all just some preteen freak-out?

Finally, the whole gang of them—doctor, parents, and child—gathered to go over the plan, Jonah sitting polite and alert while the future of his brain was discussed. They told him the proposal: a slow ramp of antidepressants, along with weekly therapy, and then, depending, some group work, if that all sounded good to Jonah.

Jonah didn't respond.

"What do you think?" the doctor said. "So you can feel better? And things can maybe go back to normal?"

"I told you, I feel fine," Jonah said.

"Yes, good! But sometimes when we're sick we think we're not. That can

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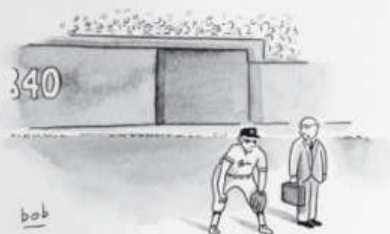
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be a symptom of being sick—to think we are well."

"So all the healthy people are just lying to themselves?"

"Well, no, of course not," the doctor said.

"Right now I never think about hurting myself, but you want to give me a medicine that might make me think about hurting myself?"

The doctor seemed uneasy.

"It's called suicidal ideation," Jonah said.

"And how do you know about that?" the doctor asked.

"The Internet."

The adults all looked at one another.

"How come people are so surprised when someone knows something?"

Jonah asked. "Your generation had better get used to how completely unspecial it is that a kid can look up a medicine online and learn about the side effects. That's not me being precocious. It's just me using my stupid computer."

"O.K., good. Well, you're right, you should be informed, and I want to congratulate you on finding that out for yourself. That's great work, Jonah."

Martin watched Jonah. He found himself hoping that the real Jonah would appear, scathing and cold, to show the doctor what they were dealing with.

"Thank you," Jonah said. "I'm really proud of myself. I didn't think I could do it, but I just really stuck with it and I kept trying until I succeeded."

Martin could not tell if the doctor caught the tone of this response.

"But you might have also read that that's a very uncommon symptom. It hardly ever happens. We just have to warn you and your parents about it, to be on the lookout for it."

"Maybe. But I have none of the symptoms of depression, either. So why would you risk making me feel like I want to kill myself if I'm not depressed and feel fine?"

"O.K., Jonah. You know what? I'm going to talk to your parents alone now. Does that sound all right? You can wait outside in the play area. There are books and games."

"O.K.," Jonah said. "I'll just run and play now."

"There," Martin said. "There," after

Jonah had closed the door. "That was it. That's what he does."

"Sarcasm? Maybe you don't much like it, but we don't treat sarcasm in young people. I think it's too virulent a strain." The doctor chuckled.

"No offense," Martin said to the doctor, "and I'm sure you know your job and this is your specialty, but I think that way of speaking to him—"

"What way?"

"Just, you know, as if he were much younger. He's just—I don't think that works with him."

"And how do you speak to him?"

"Excuse me?"

"How do you speak to him? I'm curious."

Rachel coughed and seemed uncomfortable. They'd agreed to be open, to let each other have ideas and opinions without feeling mad or threatened.

"It's true," she said. "I mean, Martin, I think you have been surprised lately that Jonah is as mature as he is. That seems to have really almost upset you. You know, you really have yelled at him a lot. We can't just pretend that hasn't happened." She looked at him apologetically. "Aside," she added, "from the scary things that he's been saying."

"Is it maturity? I don't think so. Have I been upset? Fucking hell, yes. And so have you, Rachel. And not because he thinks the Jews caused 9/11 or because he threatened to report us for sexual abuse for trying to hug him, which, for what it's worth, I spared you from, Rachel. I spared you. Because I didn't think you could bear it."

Rachel just stared at him.

"What you're seeing is a very, very bright boy," the doctor said.

"Too smart to treat?" Martin asked.

"I think family therapy would be productive. Very challenging, but worthwhile, in my opinion. I could get you a referral. What you're upset about, in relation to your son, may not fall under the purview of medicine, though."

"The purview? Really?"

"To be honest, I was on the fence about medication. Whatever is going on with Jonah, it does not present as depression. In my opinion, Jonah does not have a medical condition."



Martin stood up.  
“He’s not sick, he’s just an asshole, is what you’re saying?”

“I think that’s a very dangerous way for a parent to feel,” the doctor said.

“Yeah?” Martin said, standing over the doctor now. “You’re right. You got that one right. Because all of a parent’s feelings are dangerous, you motherfucker.”

At home that night, Martin stuffed a chicken with lemon halves, drenched it in olive oil, scattered a handful of salt over it, and blasted it in the oven until it emerged deeply burnished, with skin as crisp as glass. Rachel poured drinks for the two of them, and they cooked in silence. To Martin, it was a harmless silence. He could trust it, and if he couldn’t, then to hell with it. He wasn’t going to chase down everything unsaid and shout it into their home, as if all important messages on the planet needed to be shared. He’d said enough, things he believed, things he didn’t. Quota achieved. Quota surpassed.

Rachel looked small and tired. Beyond that, he wasn’t sure. He was more aware than ever, as she set the table and put out Lester’s cup and Jonah’s big-kid glass, how impossibly unknowable she would always be—what she thought, what she felt—how what was most special about her was the careful way she guarded it all.

No matter their theories—about Jonah or each other or the larger world—their job was to watch over Jonah on his cold voyage. He had to come back. This kind of controlled solitude was unsustainable. No one could pull it off, especially not someone so young. Except that his reasoning on this, he knew, was wishful parental bullshit. Of course a child could do it. Who else but children to lead the fucking species into darkness? Which meant what for the old-timers left behind?

Dinner was brief, destroyed by the savage appetite of Lester, who engulfed his meal before Rachel had even taken a bite, and begged, begged to be excused so that he could return to the platoon of small plastic men he’d deployed on the rug. According to Lester, his men were waiting to be

told what to do. “I need to tell my guys who to kill!” he shouted. “I’m in charge!”

At the height of this tantrum, Jonah, silent since they’d returned from the doctor’s office, leaned over to Lester, put a hand on his shoulder, and calmly told him not to whine.

“Don’t use that tone of voice,” he said. “Mom and Dad will excuse you when they’re ready.”

“O.K.,” Lester said, looking up at his brother with a kind of awe, and for the rest of their wordless dinner he sat there waiting, as patiently as a boy his age ever could, his hands folded in his lap.

At bedtime, Rachel asked Martin if he wouldn’t mind letting her sleep alone. She was just very tired. She didn’t think she could manage otherwise. She gave him a sort of smile, and he saw the effort behind it. She dragged her pillow and a blanket into a corner of the TV room and made herself a little nest there. He had the bedroom to himself. He crawled onto Rachel’s side of the mattress, which was higher, softer, less abused, and fell asleep.

In the morning, Jonah did not say goodbye on his way to school, nor did he greet Martin upon his return home. When Martin asked after his day, Jonah, without looking up, said that it had been fine. Maybe that was all there was to say, and why, really, would you ever shit on such an answer?

Jonah took up his spot on the couch and opened a book, reading quietly until dinner, while Lester played at his feet. Martin watched Jonah. Was that a grin or a grimace on the boy’s face? he wondered. And what, finally, was the difference? Why have a face at all if what was inside you was so perfectly hidden? The book Jonah was reading was nothing, some silliness. Make-believe and colorful and harmless. It looked like it belonged to a series, along with that book “The Short.” On the cover a boy, arms outspread, was gripping wires in each hand, and his whole body was glowing. ♦

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Ben Marcus on the cruelty of children.



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# THE CRITICS



MUSICAL EVENTS

## MONUMENTAL

*Laurie Anderson's "Habeas Corpus," at the Park Avenue Armory.*

BY ALEX ROSS

Visitors to Laurie Anderson's installation "Habeas Corpus," which occupied the Park Avenue Armory for three days at the beginning of October, were confronted with sights and sounds of imposing strangeness. Suspended from the ceiling of the Armory's Drill Hall was an oversized disco ball, which, fixed in cold beams of light, could have doubled as the Death Star. Myriad reflected dots created the impression of a night sky, one that curled around the walls and onto the floor. The ball turned slowly, giving the vertiginous illusion that the vast room was rotating. Playing over speakers was an ominous electronic rumble: pings and beeps, distorted voices suggestive of military transmissions, murmurs of recorded conversation, howling wind. The dominant element was a mass of feedback generated by six electric guitars leaning against amplifiers; this was "Drones," a piece designed by Anderson's late husband, Lou Reed, and performed by Stewart Hurwood. Anderson invited various musician friends to improvise in the space. When I stopped by, on the first afternoon, the saxophonist Stan Harrison was playing along with the guitar overtones, ambling about as he issued sustained pitches and bent them this way and that. Later, the saxophonist Louie Belogenis executed angular melodic figures while the trumpeter Stephanie Richards added soft, lustrous tones.

It was a cool, dark, hypnotically en-

veloping environment—an echt-New York happening that made you feel as though you had been transported to the mythic seventies, when musicians who made money driving cabs staged free-form events in seedy downtown lofts. "Whoa, awesome," people said, as they walked in. But the centerpiece of the installation was an apparition of ambiguous magnificence. At one end of the Drill Hall was a sixteen-foot-high sculpture of a seated human form, onto which was projected a silent video image of Mohammed el Gharani, a Chadian raised in Saudi Arabia, who, in the wake of the September 11th attacks, was sent to the American detention camp at Guantánamo Bay, held there for seven and a half years, and tortured. Authorities claimed that he had belonged to a London-based Al Qaeda cell; his lawyers, from the legal-action group Reprieve, responded that he had never been to London and was only fourteen when he was arrested. In 2009, an American judge ruled that the allegations against Gharani were baseless, and he was released. Anderson, who has previously staged events involving live feeds from prisons, became interested in Gharani's case earlier this year, and persuaded him to be filmed in West Africa, where he now lives. Because Gharani, like every other Guantánamo detainee, had effectively been declared a non-person—someone to whom the elementary protection of habeas corpus does not apply—Anderson made the com-

pensatory gesture of monumentalizing him. Seated with his arms at his sides, staring blankly ahead, Gharani unmistakably resembled the sculpture in the Lincoln Memorial.

Every hour or so, there was a recorded video clip of Gharani speaking. Passing over the worst of his suffering at Guantánamo, he told of his debt to Shaker Aamer, a fellow-detainee who helped him to remain sane, and of his effort to learn English by writing with soap on the door of his cell. His manner was genial, his grim stories leavened by moments of mordant wit. Only after a while did the link between the seated figure and the surrounding sonic fabric sink in: among the assaults to which Gharani was subjected was the blasting of loud music, accompanied by strobe lights. We were, in a sense, reliving Gharani's torture, even as the hip downtown soundscape unfolded.

The installation was on display from noon to seven each day. Anderson remained in the background, but in short evening sets she appeared on a stage on one side of the space and assumed the familiar role of avant-pop performer, speaking and singing over deceptively simple musical backgrounds. The program included her most famous creation, the 1981 song "O Superman." When that piece made its unexpected journey onto the pop charts—before it, Anderson had been little known outside New York circles of performance art and experimental music—it came across as an exercise in postmodern absurdism, playing off answering-machine messages and other ephemera. Within the "Habeas Corpus" apparatus, it took on eerier implications: "This is your mother. Are you there? Are you coming home? . . . Here come the planes. They're American planes. Made in America. . . . When love is gone, there's always justice. And when justice is gone, there's always force."

The indie vocalist Merrill Garbus also performed, repeatedly singing the phrase "Don't take my life away." At the end of the set, the two women were joined by Hurwood and Shahzad Ismaili, on guitar, in an amorphous, abrasive improvisation. Then, in a further disorientation, Anderson surrendered

ABOVE: TAMARA SHOPSIN





*For decades, Anderson has been holding a skeptical mirror up to America's shiny pop surfaces and techniques of social control.*

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the stage to the Syrian vocalist Omar Souleyman, a former wedding singer who fled to Turkey after the onset of the Syrian civil war and has lately become an indie-pop cult figure. As the keyboardist Chadi Kerio summoned a virtual band on his Korg synthesizer, the Armory underwent a final transformation: the simulation of the night sky now conjured a dance party in the desert. Anderson wanted to leave her audience with a sense of liberation, but, haunted by the weird, grand whole, I can't say I went home with a spring in my step.

With its thick textures and blaring message, "Habeas Corpus" seems an outlier in Anderson's four-decade catalogue, which more often teases us with oblique implications, cryptic confessions, and free-floating aphorisms. People like to think of her as the doyenne of downtown quirkiness: they recall her symphonies for car horns and for barking dogs, her residency with NASA, her various adventures in the limelight with Lou Reed. Yet her work has always had a political undertow—after all, she inaugurated her recording career with a song called "It's Not the Bullet That Kills You (It's the Hole)." For decades, she has been holding a skeptical mirror up to late-capitalist America: its shiny pop surfaces, its techniques of social control. Her pioneering mastery of digital technology allowed her to manipulate her own persona, even to change gender; by way of a digital filter, she has assumed a deep-voiced male guise that she describes as the Voice of Authority. Her feminism is sometimes blunt. In the 1989 song "Beautiful Red Dress," she notes that the average wage for women had risen to sixty-three cents for every dollar made by men, and adds, "With that kind of luck, it'll be the year 3888 before we make a buck." In an ambient musical atmosphere poised between pleasure and dread, these formulations can take on Delphic power. Listening to "Another Day in America," which appears on her 2010 album, "Homeland," I found myself shuddering at the line "Your silence will be considered your consent." The Voice of Authority, which Reed nicknamed Fen-

way Bergamot, delivered that one, with melancholy finality.

The insinuating complexity of Anderson's world view is on display in her new documentary film, "Heart of a Dog," whose soundtrack will soon be released by Nonesuch Records. Ostensibly a memorial to Anderson's beloved rat terrier, Lolabelle, the work interweaves the personal and the political, the confessional and the essayistic. The tribute to Lolabelle—a gifted animal who expressed herself in various media, including painting and piano playing—enfolds other losses. You sense an unspoken grief for Reed, who died in 2013, and, more explicitly, unease over changes in the New York cityscape. Re-counting walks with Lolabelle in the West Village, Anderson takes note of machine-gun-toting guards, automated cameras, and the pervasive "If You See Something, Say Something" slogan, which she relates to the philosophy of Wittgenstein. She also tells of taking Lolabelle into the mountains, where the dog found herself targeted by hawks. They descended with their claws out, then decided that she was too big to carry off. On Lolabelle's face, Anderson says, was a "brand-new expression": for the first time, the dog began to worry about the sky. Anderson asked herself where she had seen that anxious upward glance before, and recalled the faces of her neighbors in the weeks after September 11th—the fresh fear of destruction from above. "We had passed through a door," Anderson intones. "And we would never be going back."

Another version of that anecdote could be heard in an auxiliary station of the "Habeas Corpus" installation. In one of the Armory's smaller rooms, where high-society officers of the Gilded Age presumably relaxed after their drills, visitors saw tiny 3-D images of Anderson and Lolabelle, seated in equally tiny chairs. The self-miniaturization was, perhaps, intended to acknowledge the relative smallness of the artist's own experience in comparison with what Mohammed el Ghazani had endured. At the same time, the conjunction of stories from New York and Guantánamo seemed to crystallize Anderson's intention: she was drawing a line between the fear of evil and the evil that fear can create. ♦



A CRITIC AT LARGE

## BOMBSHELLS

*How Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl divided a world between them.*

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT



**T**ravelling from Germany to the Paris International Exposition, in the summer of 1937, Leni Riefenstahl went under an assumed name. She had no desire to confront reporters. In Paris, she won the fair's gold medal for a film she had directed, a documentary-style celebration of the Nazi Party congress three years earlier. Yet she was also forced to defend herself, in interviews, not against her Nazi ties but against the swirling rumors that she had fallen into disgrace with the leaders of the Reich. Was it true that Goebbels had repudiated her? Were some upper-echelon Nazis unhappy that a woman wielded so much power? On her way back to Berlin, exhausted, she stopped off in Berchtesgaden, where she

was escorted to Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat, so that she could describe her trip to the one man whose support for her was absolute.

Hitler had bypassed all the sanctioned Party hacks to hire Riefenstahl to direct her first official Nazi film, in 1933, and he had provided the title for the second, "Triumph of the Will," so recently triumphant in Paris. He was deeply interested in movies, and screened them often in his home. Riefenstahl, ushered into an entrance hall, found herself watching a film in progress; she recognized Marlene Dietrich's face before the Führer appeared and took her off for coffee on the terrace. Hitler's choice of a Dietrich film might have seemed curious, since his ministers

had long campaigned to destroy her reputation. Although she was the greatest movie star that Germany had ever produced, Dietrich refused to work in Germany. And it was no longer possible to pretend that her choices were not political. A few months before Riefenstahl's visit, Dietrich announced that she had applied for American citizenship, posing for reporters outside the federal building in Los Angeles with one leg propped on the running board of her chauffeured Cadillac, and saying things like "America has been good to me." The Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer* informed its readers that Dietrich's years among "the film Jews of Hollywood" had rendered her "wholly un-German"—which did not keep Hitler from very much wanting her back.

Two beautiful and ambitious Berliners, born just eight months apart—Marie Magdalene Dietrich, on December 27, 1901; Bertha Helene Amalie Riefenstahl, on August 22, 1902—both bound to shape the fantasies and touch the histories of their time. Two girls growing up amid the fear and chaos of the Great War, two artists committed to impossible ideals of physical beauty, two women who became embodiments not only of the opposing sides of the next war but, for many, of opposing forces in the human soul. They scarcely knew each other, although during the late twenties they were such close neighbors that Riefenstahl claimed she could see into Dietrich's apartment windows.

It is unlikely that Dietrich would have looked back. There are a few photographs showing the two of them at the Berlin Press Ball in early 1930: Dietrich, on the brink of the huge success of "The Blue Angel," smiles and clowns with ease, a jaunty cigarette holder clamped between her lips, the broad planes of her face soaking up the camera's light and affection; Riefenstahl, then a well-known film actress, too, stands by shy and awkward, self-consciously eclipsed. Decades later, Riefenstahl recorded several anecdotes about Dietrich in her memoirs. Dietrich, in a sketchier memoir of her own, had nothing to say about Riefenstahl. Dietrich's daughter, however, wrote of hearing a conversation in the mid-thirties about Jewish actors who had been thrown out of Germany. "Soon they won't have any talent left for their big 'cultural Reich,'" Dietrich said, "except, of course,

*Dietrich and Riefenstahl, with Anna Mae Wong, in 1930.*

that terrible Riefenstahl and Emil Janings. *They* will stay, and those two ‘well-poisoners’—the Nazis deserve!”

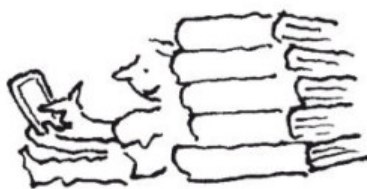
The two women never saw each other again after 1930, when Dietrich left Germany, nor did they write or speak or maintain more than a few acquaintances in common. Karin Wieland’s dual biography “Dietrich & Riefenstahl: Hollywood, Berlin, and a Century in Two Lives” (Liveright), translated from the German by Shelley Frisch, gets around these problems largely by ignoring them. The book’s alternating sections keep their subjects separate, except on a few inevitable occasions—say, when Riefenstahl received a phone call informing her that Dietrich had won the role that Riefenstahl coveted in “The Blue Angel,” and was so upset that she sent her dinner guest home without his promised goulash. This isn’t the first time the story has been told; it originates in Steven Bach’s 1992 biography of Dietrich. Bach, who interviewed Riefenstahl’s dinner guest, a film-magazine editor, observes that Riefenstahl generally did not audition but, rather, dined.

One could gain more detail about both women by reading two full-scale biographies: Bach has also written an excellent book on Riefenstahl, as has Jürgen Trimborn. Wieland is shrewd, though, about her subjects and has done serious work in German archives, producing documents—a reassuring letter from Riefenstahl to Albert Speer, in 1944, predicting a “great turning point in this war”; an unpublished memoir by Riefenstahl’s inconveniently Jewish early lover-financier; several Dietrich letters—that give her book credibility, texture, and unending interest. This is the story of two glamorous women whose achievements in another time might have been no more substantial than the images on a screen but who assumed real-life roles with the highest historical stakes. However inscrutable human conduct, it is difficult not to search these lives for insight into some of the modern era’s most difficult questions, about illusion and mass intoxication, art and truth, courage and capitulation.

Could their very different childhoods tell us something about the choices they ultimately made? Consider what it meant to be the product of a Prussian military family, a girl whose father died

before she was old enough to remember him beyond the vague impressions she listed later on as “tall, imposing stature, leather smell, shining boots, a riding whip, horses”—a father whose absence prompted her need for a “masculine model,” as she saw it, and whose mother raised her like “a kindly general,” providing every sort of lesson (violin, piano, English) on a widow’s meagre earnings. It would be easy to see here someone who came to welcome Hitler’s leather-costumed militarism, yet this is an outline of Dietrich’s childhood and the forces that she felt had made her who she was. Riefenstahl grew up in a working-class family on the rise; her mother was a seamstress, her father was a plumber who built up a successful business and was the dominating figure of her early life. Dietrich had an older sister, Riefenstahl a younger brother, both of whom were the “obedient” children in the family and pleased their parents by following conventional paths. Neither the bourgeois widow nor the ambitious plumber could accept the notion that a well-brought-up German girl would ever appear on the stage.

It seemed a particularly far-fetched dream in wartime. The war had begun just as the girls were entering adolescence—as Marie Magdalene decided she would be called by the more stage-worthy Marlene. In her diary, she wrote about attending a “real cinema” but also about the death of her uncle Otto at the front: “Shot in the neck on the fourth of December. Everybody’s crying.” Her mother



remarried, and her stepfather, too, was killed at the front; by sixteen, she was mourning her “golden youth.” Later, Dietrich recalled the meals made entirely of turnips, the cold of those years without fuel, and the continuing sacrifice of men she knew that brought her “face-to-face with the war.”

No such events or feelings seem to have touched Riefenstahl, who was not from a military family and suffered no personal losses. She lived in a “cloud of

unknowing,” or so she claimed in her memoirs, which were set on projecting the image of an artist too immersed in her work to notice her surroundings. “My mind was turned in on a tiny exclusive world,” she wrote, referring to the long hours of dance lessons that she had begun to take without her father’s knowledge. Her determination was formidable. But, at her own best evaluation, she was a woman who never came face to face with anything, because the only face she saw was her own.

By the early twenties, both young women were on the stage, having overcome parental objections by sidestepping the floozy connotations of such a career. Dietrich took lessons at the illustrious Max Reinhardt School, and performed in tiny roles in Reinhardt’s classic repertoire. Riefenstahl took to the elevated styles of modern dance then popular in Berlin, cultivating the aura of a barefoot priestess, even when costumed in a silver lamé leotard under transparent (but ethereally floating) chiffon. She also found a backer: the young Romanian-born Jewish banker Harry Sokal, who wanted to marry her but agreed instead to rent large theatres for her solo concerts, hire musicians, and take out ads. She made her professional debut in 1923 and was well received, but in less than a year a knee injury brought her career to a halt. She was on her way to a doctor, utterly depressed, when she saw a poster for a film titled “Mountain of Destiny,” featuring a man poised between steep walls of mountain rock. She skipped her appointment and went to see the movie. It proved to be one of the two great epiphanies of her life.

“Mountain films” were a genre exclusive to Germany. Flourishing in the twenties and thirties, they began as sports documentaries and turned into quasi-mystical adventures played out on icy peaks by supremely heroic skiers or mountain climbers. The pioneer director of these films was Arnold Fanck, a geologist who’d taught himself to use a movie camera, a technical innovator with no studio connections. Riefenstahl was enthralled by “Mountain of Destiny,” and was determined to be part of Fanck’s next venture, even though the only mountains she’d ever seen were on postcards. Fanck responded to her overture by quickly writing a screenplay just for her;



it may have helped that Harry Sokal had agreed to pay a quarter of the film's costs.

"The Holy Mountain" opened with a closeup of Riefenstahl's face and continued with a sequence of her dancing on a shelf of rock above the sea: she was a joyous nymph, a child of nature, and a brand-new movie star. The film, which centered on the rivalry between two mountaineering friends for the dancer's favor, was Fanck's biggest success so far. Riefenstahl later revealed that Hitler had admired her "dance on the sea," but even at the time of the film's release, in 1926, it was interpreted politically, by critics on both the disapproving left ("Obtrusive propaganda for noble-blond, high-altitude humanity") and the welcoming right ("This way, German film, to the holy mountain of your rebirth and that of the German people!").

Riefenstahl went on to make several more mountain films with Fanck. She became adept at skiing and climbing, and did all her own stunts, often in freezing weather. She was hauled up on ropes through a real avalanche; she crossed a treacherous chasm on a wobbly ladder laid end to end. She was an early action heroine. But she wanted something more—to make a film with an esteemed director, with a real studio, *indoors*. In August, 1929, the renowned Josef von Sternberg took a few months off from Hollywood to make a movie in Berlin, and word went out that he needed a young female star. Riefenstahl did some assiduous dining with Sternberg; later on, to save face, she claimed that it was she who had told him all about Marlene Dietrich.

"The Blue Angel" was meant to be a vehicle for the German silent-film star Emil Jannings, who had also had a big success in Hollywood—he had just won the first Academy Award for Best Actor—but, with limited English, was returning to Berlin to make his first official talkie. Produced by the biggest German studio, Ufa, with Paramount's coöperation, the film was to be shot in both a German and an English version. Sternberg first saw Dietrich that September, in a musical, and was struck by her "cold disdain" for the buffoonery around her. Neither Jannings nor the producer wanted her: at twenty-seven, she had long since traded the classics for a string of stage and film roles as a glam-



*"Here's the deal: we call the shots when you're young, you call the shots when we're old, and everything in between is a non-stop battle for control."*

our girl, and she seemed already somewhat past her prime: early comparisons to Garbo had become criticism of her "slavish imitation" of Hollywood's reigning star.

Sternberg's film, based on the novel "Professor Unrat," by Heinrich Mann, was the story of an old and priggish teacher who falls for a small-time cabaret singer. The professor was the central role, the girl merely the agent of his destruction. But Sternberg had changed the title to the name of the cabaret—and, by intimation, to the girl—in the hope of turning the emphasis around. When Dietrich stepped onstage, he knew the idea would work.

At ease with her sexual powers, wryly funny, unflinchingly amoral, Lola Lola, the cabaret singer of "The Blue Angel," was also a new sort of woman on the screen. Dietrich wasn't yet the goddess she would become: she's rough around the edges, a bit thick in the waist, less polished and more natural than she ever was again. But in her white satin top hat and her exposed garters, flashing her legs while singing "Falling in Love Again"—"What's a girl to do? I can't help it"—she was the essence of Weimar sexual

sophistication, the imperturbable center of the night world that Sternberg built around her. Seedy but vital, that world was filled with magical detail: a chorus of chubby overage showgirls, a live bear led calmly through Lola Lola's dressing room, a mysteriously sad and silent clown overlooking all. Nothing could be further from Riefenstahl's mountain films. Even Sternberg's city alleyways are painted scenery; only the psychology of the main characters seems entirely real. The Nazi Party condemned "The Blue Angel," if to little effect. But Dietrich was gone by then, in any case. She read the first German reviews ("Fascinating as no woman has ever been before in film") on shipboard, on her way to Hollywood, where Sternberg waited to complete her transformation.

"I am Marlene," he said later, and she agreed. She inscribed a photograph that she gave him, a year after her arrival, "To my creator, from his creation." He was in love with her, but even more in love with the image of her that he projected on the screen. She was not in love with him; after an initial romance, he made love to her only through the

She became slimmer, blonder, sleeker, her cheekbones carved by shadow, a golden nimbus haloing her hair. The melancholic weariness of her opening scene in "Morocco" (1930), their first Hollywood film, betrays an overly close study of Garbo, but once she dons a tux, kisses a woman, and seduces Gary Cooper, all in the next scene, she's nobody but Dietrich (unless she's Sternberg). Nowhere this side of female impersonation has such evident pleasure been taken in the artifice of womanhood: playing an errant spy in their next film, "Dis-honored," set in the Vienna of the First

A month later, Riefenstahl experienced her second epiphany, in a stadium packed with cheering rowdies at a Hitler rally in Berlin. She seems to have been as inspired to become part of Hitler's enterprise as she had been with Fanck and his mountain films, and the possibilities for advancement now were much greater. She had recently directed a film of her own, "The Blue Light," which brought into the open the mysticism of the mountain genre: Riefenstahl played an otherworldly girl, spiritually tied to the beauty of a crystal-lined cave on a mountaintop, who dies when greedy villagers hack out the crystal. Riefenstahl had surely not intended the political intimations later discerned in the film. But, according to Harry Sokal, who left Germany in 1933, the negative reviews by several Berlin critics, some or all of whom were Jews, prompted an outpouring of anti-Semitism from the outraged director, who at about this time, with notable obtuseness, urged Sokal to read "Mein Kampf."

*"O.K., you've pretty much nailed D minor."*



propaganda, but it was a rush job, carried out with modest means. Riefenstahl assured him that she could do better. When he entrusted her with the much bigger rally to be held the following year, he demanded only that she render it “artistically meaningful.”

“Triumph of the Will” met the demands of the man who commissioned and financed it. Sixteen cameramen with sixteen assistants, nine aerial photographers, a sound crew, a lighting crew, drivers, guards: some hundred and seventy men reported to a director who had become the most important woman and the most important artist in the Reich. Plans for the six-day rally, which brought more than half a million people into the medieval city of Nuremberg, were made side by side with plans for the film. Albert Speer, the “chief decorator” of the event, was responsible for the visual drama: the obliterating seas of flags, the towering eagle behind the speakers’ platform, the “cathedral of light” made up of anti-aircraft searchlights beaming upward in Valhalla splendor. And all of it not only captured by Riefenstahl’s cameras but magnified and mythologized, so that the film itself has become a part of the history it documents.

It begins amid the clouds, from whence the Führer descends in his plane to spread joy among his people and to oversee a furiously rehearsed Nazi machine. Cranking up the sort of ingenuity she’d learned from Fanck, who mounted cameras on downhill skiers, Riefenstahl set her cameras gliding along tracks, soaring high in a specially built elevator, whizzing along with a crew on roller skates: every scene is in motion. Speeches by Party leaders were reduced to a few pithy lines (Julius Streicher: “A nation that does not protect its racial purity will perish!”) and reshot when necessary on a studio set. Hitler, in countless close-ups, is viewed worshipfully from below, his face against the sky, his every word provoking an electric response. This is the leader, still consolidating power, whom the German people came to know. As much as any Hollywood director, Riefenstahl turned a human being into a god and urged a nation to fall hopelessly in love.

She completed one more major film before the start of the war, “Olympia,” a two-part record of the 1936 summer

Olympics, in Berlin, which was used as a showcase for the ostensibly peaceful new regime. Even more ambitious as filmmaking, involving further innovations—powerful telephoto lenses, underwater cameras—“Olympia” was no more a straightforward record of events than “Triumph of the Will.” Practice sessions were spliced in, winners replicated their feats, film segments of the diving sequence were reversed to suggest the exhilaration of flight: this was a tribute to human strength, striving, and beauty. The surprisingly close attention that Riefenstahl’s cameras paid to Jesse Owens, the African-American star of the games, was meant to assuage the world’s fears about German policies, as were the many images of a smiling, chatting, unprecedentedly “human” Hitler. And yet Riefenstahl’s shots of Owens have an undeniable warmth. It’s an insoluble paradox that she demonstrates real devotion to the achievements of both men.

The enormous expenses of “Olympia” got Riefenstahl into funding fights with Goebbels, leading to the rumors in the Paris papers that only slightly marred her reception at the Exposition there in 1937. But “Olympia” was her greatest success yet. It had its première as the climax of Hitler’s birthday festivities, in April, 1938; Goebbels awarded her the German Film Prize. Intended for an international audience, the film was shown to prolonged applause through much of Europe before Riefenstahl set off for Hollywood to obtain American distribution. She reached New York in early November, just days before Kristallnacht, which she claimed was a slanderous falsehood perpetrated by the American press. Arriving in Hollywood some two weeks later, she found that no major figure except Walt Disney was willing to see her.

Dietrich was not in Hollywood at the time. Her last three films with Sternberg had been commercial disasters, as exotic fantasy gave way to hysterical extravaganza. She still believed she needed him as a director, but he had grown sick—to judge by the films, very sick—of being needed only in that way. There’s little love in the camera’s eye for anything but the Byzantine-crazy sets and costumes of “The Scarlet Empress” (Dietrich as Catherine the Great), and there’s a definite cruelty in its regard for her in their final

film, “The Devil Is a Woman”: harshly made up—her semicircular eyebrows suggest permanent shock—and wearing a fringed lampshade on her head, she’s a parody of the woman she used to be. Paramount soon let her contract expire. During the late thirties, she travelled in Europe, failed to persuade her mother and sister to leave Germany, and made a few films that were less interesting than her list of lovers, which included Erich Maria Remarque and the French actor Jean Gabin. It was Gabin’s decision to join the Free French in North Africa that made Dietrich realize she could not “let the war pass me by.” At the end of 1943, she joined the U.S.O. and took on the greatest role of her life.

It’s hard to say whether her true uniform was the Eisenhower jacket, which she made appear the height of chic, or the sequinned gowns she wore onstage in front of the troops, singing and sometimes playing a musical saw—a ridiculous instrument that she used to tremendous effect, hoisting her skirt and placing it between her legs to sound a tune. She started out in Algiers and travelled the length of Italy, following the boys, often giving two shows a day in primitive conditions: Naples, Anzio, Rome, eventually Belgium, and finally into Germany. She put in more time at the front than any other performer. She sang on the radio, too, broadcasting not only to Allied troops but behind German military lines: her specialty was “Lili Marlene,” a soldier’s love song so sad that Goebbels banned it as demoralizing. (Dietrich’s friend Ernest Hemingway wrote that “if she had nothing more than her voice she could break your heart with it.”) Shortly after V-E Day, she travelled to the camp at Belsen, where she’d heard that her sister had been found, only to discover that she was not a prisoner but had been helping her husband run a movie theatre for Nazi personnel, living comfortably amid the horror. The Americans hushed up the story to spare their tireless warrior the headlines. Dietrich took care of her sister, quietly, for many years, but never spoke of her again.

People lie, and so do images. Early in the war, after witnessing a pogrom by German soldiers, Riefenstahl backed out of a film she’d begun making about Hitler’s victories at the Polish front. If

her conscience troubled her further, though, she hid it well: the same month, she was on the dais at the victory celebration for the taking of Warsaw. She made no more official Nazi films, but the inverted mountain movie that she worked on during the war, titled “Lowlands,” was lavishly financed by the Reich. Starting in 1948, she was put on trial four times; in the end, she was judged to be nothing worse than a “fellow-traveller.” As for Dietrich, no one else would have been asked to play the Nazi-collaborating cabaret singer in “A Foreign Affair” (1948), a Hollywood film set in bombed-out Berlin. The Vienna-reared director, Billy Wilder—a Jew whose mother was murdered by the Nazis—confounded every expectation by favoring Dietrich’s morally ambiguous temptress over Jean Arthur’s shrilly all-American ingénue. Dietrich, glittering and gorgeous, sang her darkly cynical numbers (“Want to buy some illusions, slightly used?”) accompanied at the piano by the composer Friedrich Hollaender, who had written the songs for “The Blue Angel,” eighteen years earlier, shortly before he, too, fled to Hollywood. In these two films, Dietrich embodies the bold beginning and the tragic end of the same German story.

Dietrich’s real-life heroism allowed her to play women who had shown none of her moral courage and invest them with human dimension. In 1948, when the publication of the fraudulent diaries of Eva Braun “revealed” salacious stories about Riefenstahl, newspapers gleefully predicted “Marlene to play Leni” in the movie version. She might have lent even this role some sympathy. She is said to have based the exquisitely cultured and willfully unknowing Nazi she played in “Judgment at Nuremberg,” in 1961, on her mother.

Riefenstahl’s redemption, beyond the military courts, was a subject of fierce argument for the rest of her very long life—she died in 2003, a decade after Dietrich, at the age of a hundred and one. She never saw the need to offer an apology, and her memoirs, which appeared in Germany in 1987, were filled with self-justifying fabrications. But the fact that the two major films Riefenstahl made for the Nazis remain so powerful has meant that the real argument is about art. We do not expect artists to be heroes, but we have

come to accept that the art of totalitarian regimes is, by a kind of moral corollary, bound to be bathetic kitsch. It is deeply unsteady to ponder the possibility that Riefenstahl might have been both a considerable artist and a considerable Nazi. Critics have long pressed for resolution, one way or the other.

As early as 1955, a group of American film directors—many of whom had refused to see Riefenstahl when she came to Hollywood in 1938—named “Olympia” one of the ten best films ever made, alongside “Battleship Potemkin” and “Citizen Kane.” Just a decade after the war, one could presumably tell the artist from the art. In 1965, Susan Sontag wrote that both “Olympia” and “Triumph of the Will” transcended “the categories of propaganda or even reportage,” but she changed her mind when, nine years later, her position no longer seemed a daring stand for formal values but a dangerous commonplace, with the two films becoming festival favorites and the director approaching the status of a pop star.

In 1973, Riefenstahl launched a new career as a photographer, with a lauded book of color images of the Nuba, a majestic tribe in remote central Sudan. The subject, as far from her past as possible, supported the increasingly widespread contention that the only constant in her work was a devotion to physical beauty, without regard to race. Sontag, in an essay that seems to have made Riefenstahl angrier than anything Hitler had done, countered that the only constant in Riefenstahl’s work was its inherent Fascism, evident precisely in this devotion to physical beauty, among other things, and in its exclusion of human complexity. It’s a strong argument about intention: a refusal to separate the artist from the art. The photographs, however, remain indistinguishable in any moral or political sense from those taken of the Nuba by George Rodger, the English war photographer whose work inspired Riefenstahl, and whose perspective was anything but Fascist: Rodger, accompanying the British Army in 1945, had been among the first to photograph the corpses at Belsen.

The dedication to beauty had its dangers for Dietrich, too. She spent much of the last two decades of her professional life on the concert stage and on the move, from Paris to Las Vegas, stirring memories and breaking hearts—she

sang “Lili Marlene” again in Germany, and in Israel—and punishing her body beyond endurance to maintain the glamour of years past. From the late seventies, when the glamour seemed beyond recall, she sequestered herself in her Paris apartment. Her “Judgment at Nuremberg” co-star, Maximilian Schell, made a documentary film about her when she was eighty-one, without being allowed to photograph her. Billy Wilder promised that he’d blindfold himself if only she’d let him visit her, but she declined.

One might have expected Riefenstahl to be the isolated one, but freedom from shame proved a great advantage. She shared her later years with a devoted camera assistant four decades her junior. She took up scuba diving in her seventies, and continued straight through her nineties, posing in her bathing gear and publishing books of underwater photographs, practically daring anyone to talk about Fascist images of fish. Yet the old questions continued to vex her. “So what am I guilty of?” she asked an interviewer in the final moments of a three-hour documentary about her life, released in 1993. “I didn’t drop any atomic bombs. I didn’t denounce anyone. So where does my guilt lie?”

Near the end of “Judgment at Nuremberg,” Dietrich, the widow of a convicted Nazi general, waits expectantly for the verdict in the American military trial of four German judges. Like her husband, these men were not blatant monsters but influential figures who went along with the monstrous plans. The movie, directed by Stanley Kramer, is a document of its time: the late fifties, when people were just beginning to come to terms with the Holocaust. One of the trial scenes contained actual footage from the liberation of the camps, the first such images that many people had seen. Dietrich’s role—written with her in mind—is the aggrieved persona of German innocence. “Do you think we knew of those things?” she asks the American judge, offended in her dignity. “We did not know. *We did not know.*” The verdict, nevertheless, is guilty. In the aftermath, the judge calls her to say goodbye, and Dietrich has one of her finest moments, with no lines to say at all: there is just her magnificent face, half in shadow, suddenly aged and blanched of life, as she sits silently and lets the telephone ring. ♦



# SORRY NOT SORRY

*Reading Dalkey Archive Press's Library of Korean Literature.*

BY ED PARK



A casual reader of the news from South Korea could be forgiven for wondering whether Koreans apologize more than other people do. Public expressions of contrition abound. Last year, President Park Geun-hye apologized for the government's mishandling of the Sewol ferry disaster, and *JoongAng Ilbo*, one of the country's major newspapers, ran a full-page apology for its sensationalist coverage of the tragedy. When, earlier this year, the MERS virus spread through Seoul's Samsung Medical Center, the minister of health apologized "for causing concern and anxiety" by underestimating the disease's contagiousness, and the heir apparent to the Samsung

Group did the same, bowing deeply from the waist on national television. Then, there was last year's "nut rage" incident, in which a Korean Air Lines executive went berserk after a flight attendant served her macadamia nuts in a bag rather than in a bowl. She demanded that he beg her forgiveness, only to apologize herself, later, as did her father, the company's chairman, and her sister, who had threatened to seek vengeance on whistle-blowing employees. And Korean-Americans might recall that the country's Ambassador to the United States called on them to "repent" after it was discovered that the gunman who carried out the Virginia Tech massacre was born

in Korea, proposing a thirty-two-day fast, one day per victim, to prove that Koreans were a "worthwhile ethnic minority in America."

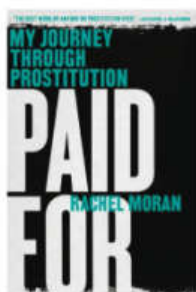
Hierarchy—social, corporate, political—is the major organizing principle of Korean life, and apology is one of its crucial mechanisms. When those lower down the chain screw up, decorum demands that they apologize to those higher up; when those higher up wrong those lower down, apology functions as an affirmation of accountability, an expression of responsibility of the few toward the many. South Korea perennially demands apology from Japan, its former colonizer, which in 1993 acknowledged forcing women (many of them Korean) into sexual slavery during the Second World War. There are practical reasons for wanting such repeated reassurance; the rise of aggressive nationalism in a neighbor that has invaded you countless times across the centuries is certainly a distressing trend. But South Korea's insistence on fresh acknowledgment of misdeeds long past, and its distress when such acknowledgment fails to come, also stem from the quintessentially Korean concept of *han*, a mélange of sadness, rage, and despair—a condition born of a sense of oppression and grievance, and impossible to assuage by apologies alone.

The Korean apology is satirized to harrowing effect in "At Least We Can Apologize," a darkly comic 2009 novel by the South Korean writer Lee Ki-ho, published in this country by Dalkey Archive Press as part of its Library of Korean Literature series. The narrator, Jin-man, is equipped with a literal mind and a disconcerting lack of curiosity, and lives at "the institution," a disreputable mental ward that doubles as a sock-packaging plant. Fluorescent lights burn around the clock, and the staff subdues residents with daily cocktails of pills. "When I first entered the institution I was beaten almost daily," Jin-man recounts, in Christopher J. Dykas's translation. "I was beaten in the morning, beaten at lunchtime, and beaten before bed." As he goes through the menu of brutality, a certain giddiness sets in:

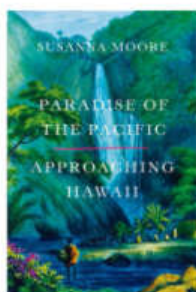
I was beaten with a pointer, beaten with a steel pipe, slapped, punched, kicked with a booted foot, and even beaten with a thick book. I was beaten with a chair, beaten with a trashcan, beaten with socks, and beaten with

*The best South Korean fiction coats the country's existential tumult in dark humor.*

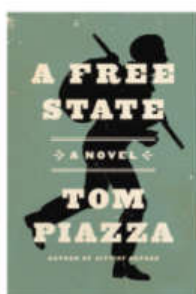
## BRIEFLY NOTED



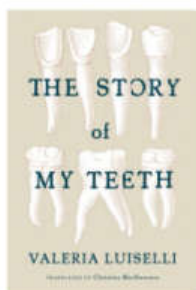
**PAID FOR**, by Rachel Moran (Norton). Moran is an Irish activist who became a prostitute at the age of fifteen. Her polemical memoir critiques well-meaning liberals for framing prostitution as a professional choice. When familial abuse, poverty, and homelessness form the context of such choice, as they did for Moran and other women she knew during her seven years on the streets and in the brothels of Dublin, “coercion” is an apter term than “choice.” Moran is adamant that there are no “happy hookers”; there are only those who survive that charade, at crippling psychological cost. The book is grimmest when detailing the lessons a prostitute internalizes: don’t gag, don’t cry, stun with alcohol and drugs.



**PARADISE OF THE PACIFIC**, by Susanna Moore (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). This richly documented history of Hawaii shows how quickly it was transformed from a highly ritualized oral culture to a modern one. Just fifty years after James Cook first sighted Kauai, in 1777, nearly half the native population was literate. The clash of worlds gave rise to fantastic hybrids, lasting myths, and appalling numbers of deaths from disease and violence. Moore’s narrative, built around lengthy, unfiltered personal accounts, has a satisfying roughness to it and highlights the absurdities of colonial life. Protestant missionaries were baffled by the Hawaiians’ linguistic playfulness, as when elders shouted “Keke!” to women sitting with their legs apart. (It means “the teeth are exposed.”)



**A FREE STATE**, by Tom Piazza (Harper). In this historical novel, set in 1855, a banjo-playing fugitive slave named Henry Sims joins a blackface minstrel group in Philadelphia and becomes a sensation. A sadistic bounty hunter pursues him. Trapped between them is an impresario who salvages his troupe’s fortunes (and breaks the law) by employing Sims. Piazza, an authority on jazz, blues, and bluegrass, includes fascinating nuggets of musical history and period detail, including a climactic scene at Senator William H. Seward’s home, which was a stop on the Underground Railroad. While the book strives to be both a literary thriller and a meditation on the complexities and contradictions of America’s cultural heritage, its pleasures are mostly those of the well-paced page-turner.



**THE STORY OF MY TEETH**, by Valeria Luiselli, translated from the Spanish by Christina MacSweeney (Coffee House Press). This highly inventive novel is narrated by a garrulous auctioneer who invents “hypertrue” stories for the objects he sells. Having acquired the teeth of Marilyn Monroe, he auctions off his own teeth with fantastic tales of their former owners: “Who will open the bidding for this solitary, furry tooth of Rousseau?” The book was funded by an arts grant and collaboratively written in installments by Luiselli and workers at a Mexico City juice factory; as a result, it displays an imaginative hyperactivity that occasionally veers into gimmickry. Yet it is a work of immense charm and originality, written in vivid, witty prose.

a shovel. After being beaten like this for some time, one day I looked over and there was Si-bong. He had both arms wrapped around his head as he was being beaten. That was the first time that Si-bong and I met. After that, we were beaten together every day. We were beaten together under our beds, beaten together in the hallway, beaten together after being called into the office, beaten together in the workroom, beaten together on the hill behind the institution, and beaten together in front of the main gate. Being beaten together like that for so long, we became friends.

Falsely confessing to random wrongdoing—swearing at their superiors, throwing out medication—results in milder punishment, so Jin-man and Si-bong learn to game the system:

Si-bong admitted to cursing the caretakers again and was beaten repeatedly in the thighs with a steel pipe. The caretakers said that committing the same wrong again was an even greater wrong. So we had to come up with new wrongs every day. Some of them became “wrongs,” while others became “greater wrongs.” On days we committed wrongs, we were beaten less, on days we committed “greater wrongs,” we were beaten a lot, and on days we admitted to nothing, we were beaten repeatedly all day long.

Jin-man and Si-bong are honest liars. They always make sure to commit their offenses after admitting to them, proving so adept at the racket that their caretakers put them in charge of collecting the apologies of the other inmates. This equilibrium is interrupted by the arrival of a new guy, “the man with the sideburns,” who despairs at his confinement and tosses messages over the institution’s fence in an attempt to reach the outside world. Jin-man and Si-bong start to copy him, packing their notes—“*We are being held captive. If you find this note, please report this to the police. The man in our room said that you will be generously rewarded*”—into sock crates. The messages hit their mark. The institution collapses in scandal, and Jin-man and Si-bong emerge to a media frenzy. Camping out at the dingy apartment of Si-bong’s sister and her pimp boyfriend, they fruitlessly hunt for jobs until they hit on the idea of marketing their sole indisputable skill: apologizing for someone else’s sins.

One of their first customers is a ten-year-old boy who has stolen money from his mother’s purse. Jin-man and Si-bong accompany him to his mother’s small food shop, where the irate woman threatens to “break this little bastard’s wrist.” Primed



by their impeccable training at the institution, the newly minted businessmen spring into action, offering their own bodies up for abuse. As mother and son look on in horror, Si-bong takes a pipe and whacks Jin-man repeatedly on the wrist.

"An apology means that you say you're not going to do the same thing that you did before," Si-bong explains to another customer. "That's all it is. There's nothing we can do about your feelings, sir." By outsourcing a gesture whose only value comes from the intent behind it, Jin-man and Si-bong turn the apology, that most civilized of interactions, into a mercenary performance, a backstreet Grand Guignol. It's a lucrative one, too. "There are wrongs upon wrongs out there," the pimp says, with growing excitement at the new business's possibilities. "That means the apologies will just keep coming."

"At Least We Can Apologize" is divided into three sections, whose titles—"Finding Wrong," "Creating Wrong," and "Cultivating Wrong"—describe a surefire, if unmistakably cynical, business strategy. What started, at the institution, as a simple means of survival becomes, in the outside world, an industry with the promise of limitless growth.

For American readers, literary evocations of Korea have come, for the most part, in the form of dystopian novels written by people without any direct connection to the country. Adam Johnson's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "The Orphan Master's Son," is set in the harsh confines of North Korea; at the other extreme, David Mitchell's "Cloud Atlas" features a futuristic South Korea-inspired "corpocracy," a hotbed of clones, plastic surgery ("facescaping"), and insurrection. With few exceptions, novels by actual Koreans have not registered here. Kyung-sook Shin's "Please Look After Mom" briefly appeared on the *Times* best-seller list in 2011. (She made headlines this year amid charges that she once plagiarized passages from a Yukio Mishima story, for which—yes—she later apologized.) Kim Young-ha's "I Have the Right to Destroy Myself" (2007) and Hwang Sok-yong's "The Old Garden" (2009) both received a trickle of reviews, and Yi Mun-yol's story "An Anonymous Island" appeared in these pages in 2011. That's about it.

Happily, Dalkey Archive's series, launched in 2013, in collaboration with the Literature Translation Institute of Korea, provides a panoramic view of Korean fiction, in all its strangeness and variety, from the nineteen-thirties to the present.

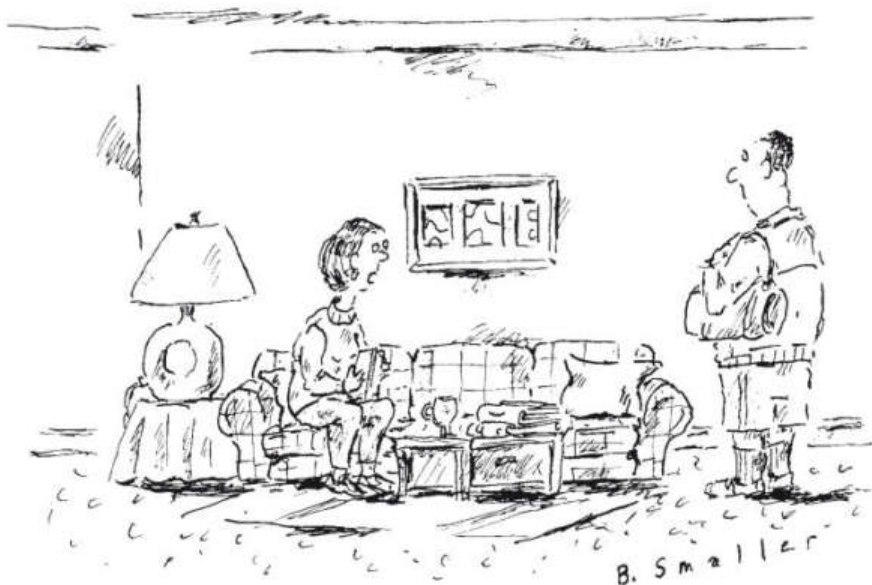
That's a significant span in the life of any country, but all the more so in the case of Korea. Two decades ago, when I spent a year in Seoul, the city my parents came from, after I graduated from college, I couldn't have fathomed that South Korea would become an epicenter of state-of-the-art anything; there was hardly any evidence that a new, high-tech, high-speed civilization was on the way. Things changed after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. As Euny Hong detailed last year, in her book "The Birth of Korean Cool," the South Korean government, reeling from the recession, decided to invest in pop culture as a prime export, resulting in the wildly popular boy bands and girl bands and soap operas that went on to make up *hallyu*, the wave of Korean culture that has swept over Asia, and, increasingly, the rest of the world. These days, South Korea is famous for being among the most wired countries in the world, with whip-fast Internet speeds and a smartphone in every hand. Thousands fill stadiums to watch video-game tournaments, and plastic surgery seems as common as hair dye. It sounds like science fiction.

Such breakneck change can't help but come at a price. The titular mother in

"Please Look After Mom," for instance, travels from the countryside to Seoul to visit her grown children, only to get lost in the subway. The novel captures the unsettling dislocation of the country's rapid rural-to-urban transformation, and the transition from an elder-venerating Confucian hierarchy to a youth-focussed culture obsessed with physical beauty. This degree of change has left a deadly legacy: as Kim Young-ha noted in a *Times* Op-Ed last year, South Korea's suicide rate has been the highest in the industrialized world for eight years running.

The novels in the Library of Korean Literature series are populated with the broken and the dispossessed, young drifters, like Jin-man and Si-bong, looking to carve out a place for themselves in an ungraspable, shifting world. Another such character introduces himself in the first sentence of Jang Jung-il's novel "When Adam Opens His Eyes," translated by Hwang Sun-Ae and Horace Jeffery Hodges: "I was nineteen years old, and the things that I most wanted to have were a typewriter, prints of Munch's paintings and a turntable for playing records." The nameless narrator (he's called Adam by a lover, in honor of his being her first man) hasn't scored high enough on the standardized exam to get into the university of his choice, so he plans to spend a year cramming.

Naturally, he doesn't lift a finger to accomplish that goal—which isn't to say



*"You can lie to me, you can lie to your trainer, you can even lie to yourself, but you can't lie to your Fitbit."*

that he does nothing. A hundred pages later, he buys a typewriter, and with it the promise of a different, differently programmed life. “If I write a novel, I will begin by depicting the portrait of my 19th year this way,” he says, and then quotes the book’s first paragraph nearly verbatim. This seems an optimistic conclusion—the narrator has made something of himself, and we’ve just finished reading the evidence—but, on the next page, Jang violently drops us into the novel’s wildly discordant final section, “The Seventh Day.” If the book’s first stretch was a study in passivity, “The Seventh Day” is all action: sex, lots of it, between an unnamed man and woman, graphically described and mixed with literary chat. “No virgin finds climaxing easy in her first experience,” Jang deadpans. “Except that this is a porno novel.” (The transgressive 1999 film “Lies,” which might be retitled “Fifty Thousand Shades of Grey,” was based on another of Jang’s novels.) Like the coda to Don DeLillo’s “The Names” or Wong Kar-wai’s “Days of Being Wild,” the end of “When Adam Opens His Eyes” seems spliced in from a different work. Who are these nameless, insatiable characters? Maybe they are yet another product—concentrated, unbearably intense—of the narrator’s typewriter, the vision that comes with Adam’s newly gained knowledge of the world.

“When Adam Opens His Eyes” was published in 1990, before South Korea’s great pop boom; the narrator’s typewriter and cassette player are practical necessities, not ironic totems of a bygone age. But a number of more recent novels betray a certain nostalgia for an earlier, less technological time, when life didn’t have to be constantly mediated by a screen. No computers show up in “At Least We Can Apologize,” and when Jin-man and Si-bong make calls they do it strictly via pay phone. A similar analog atmosphere can be found in “No One Writes Back,” by Jang Eun-jin, also published in 2009, and translated by Jung Yewon. “I left home with an MP3 player and a novel in an old backpack,” the novel begins. The speaker is Jihun, who for three years has moved from motel to motel with his late grandfather’s faithful, though blind, guide dog. He spends his time looking for places to stay, carrying on a one-sided correspondence with the peo-

ple he meets on his rambles, and skirting his own vast, withheld sorrow. “I write letters because I want to convey to someone the stories of these people,” he explains, “but also because I want to let someone know that a day had existed for me as well.” One gets the sense that the immediacy of text messaging and e-mail would be too much for Jihun to handle; he wants to make contact with other people, but not at the expense of keeping his distance.

“No One Writes Back” is composed of short, numbered chapters, its progression echoing Jihun’s own peripatetic existence. As if to avoid the complications that could come from any budding intimacy, Jihun assigns numbers rather than names to the people he writes to. “My name is...,” one of the people he encounters, a writer selling her novel on the subway, starts to tell him. He cuts her short: “I don’t want to know,” I say, because I fear that we really will have to get to know each other once we start calling each other by name.”

The book’s centerpiece is Jihun’s letter to his sister, who has become a cosmetic-surgery addict. “With scissors in hand, you cut up all the photos with your face in them, and even burned up the photos of your hundredth day celebration and your first birthday party,” he writes. The letter is a heartbroken critique of a society gone insane with images. Seen through Jihun’s eyes, the Korean craze for such facescaping starts to seem a sort of unconscious sacrifice: in order to be properly absorbed, the dramatic changes visited on the nation need to be visited on the body as well.

The most appealing novels in the Library of Korean Literature capture the existential turbulence of *han* while keeping a sense of humor about it. The didactic moments in Yi Kwang-su’s “The Soil,” a social-realist tome originally serialized in 1932 and 1933, are balanced with wry observations of customs and people, such as the modern man who has internalized Japanese values and looks down his nose at his country’s educational system: “Yes, there’s the Department of Korean Literature. I really don’t know what students learn there. I think literature is useless anyway. And to study Korean literature? Even worse.” (Yi, the most famous writer in the series, was one

of the country’s first modernists and a leader of the Korean independence movement, though he was later tarred as a Japanese collaborator.)

More recently, Park Min-gyu’s “Pavane for a Dead Princess,” set in the late nineteen-eighties and translated by Amber Hyun Jung Kim, tracks the doomed romance of its handsome narrator, a valet at a fancy shopping mall, and his co-worker, a shy, intelligent woman who is mocked for being homely—“the world’s ugliest woman.” Though she had the best grades at her vocational school, she’s never promoted; Park is blunt about the unfairness of a society wrapped up in surfaces, in which the unlovely are confined to a kind of permanent underclass, at least until they go under the knife. “Pavane” is a bildungsroman that veers into metafiction, bristling with footnotes and multiple endings. There’s also plenty of comic relief, such as this sterling career advice for a new valet, turning the impulse to apologize on its head:

“Now let’s suppose there’s been an accident. This is what you have to do, so listen and learn. First, take off your armband and cap. Next, run back to the office without looking back. If the supervisor’s there, knock him out. Open the second drawer of his desk and look for your employee record. Either tear that into shreds and swallow it or burn it. Then run straight home. Then start looking for another job. Is that clear?”

When you do something wrong, flee the scene: this would be bad business for Jin-man and Si-bong, inverting the bleak social order that they aim to exploit. Later in “At Least We Can Apologize,” Jin-man and Si-bong are recaptured by the sinister caretakers of the institution; the only way for Jin-man to escape is to sacrifice his friend. “I had committed a wrong against him, but I missed him very much,” Jin-man thinks. “That was all.” Apologies are only a partial salve for wrongdoing; they acknowledge, but do not reverse, the harm that’s been done. Jin-man, it turns out, has a conscience. This discovery recalls a line from the start of the novel, the attempt by the man with the sideburns to open Jin-man and Si-bong’s eyes: “‘Look at you! You guys are fine and you’re locked up in here!’” Maybe Jin-man and Si-bong were never crazy to begin with—no crazier, in any case, than the country awaiting them outside the gates. ♦



## REBIRTH OF VENUS

*Robin Coste Lewis's historical art.*

BY DAN CHIASSON



Robin Coste Lewis's debut poetry collection, "Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems" (Knopf), derives its title from a notorious eighteenth-century engraving by Thomas Stothard, "The Voyage of the Sable Venus from Angola to the West Indies." The image was slave-trade propaganda: it shows an African woman posed like Botticelli's Venus on a weirdly upholstered half shell. She glides serenely across the Middle Passage, attended by an entourage of cherubs and dolphins and escorted by a predatory Triton, who looks as though he'd read the poem on which the engraving is based: Isaac Teale's "The Sable Venus, An Ode," which celebrates the pleasures of raping slave women, since black and white—

Sable Venus and Botticelli's Venus—are, after all, the same "at night."

"The Voyage of the Sable Venus" has made its own voyage—that word's bitter irony, lost on its original audience, is now its meaning—and ended up in this arresting book, whose title subtly transforms it. Titles establish property; change the title, and you've wrested from the history of racism a powerful symbol for the emergence of black women as the depictees of their own lives. But a voyage requires both an origin and a destination, and so the eighteenth-century engraving and the twenty-first-century book operate as two shores in a trip from the lurid past, in which African women were transported to be sold into slavery as property,

to the current day, when an African-American woman like Lewis can recast history in her own brilliant, troubling terms. Google the phrase "voyage of the sable venus," and you will see how these two works are now linked, in both the old and the new senses of that word.

Lewis's volume, nominated for a National Book Award, takes its place in a line of important reclamations of "Venus" from its use as a humiliating designation for black women and for depictions of them, including Rita Dove's "The Venus of Willendorf" and Elizabeth Alexander's "The Venus Hottentot." (You could argue that Venus Williams, perhaps the most famous Venus since the Roman goddess, has, with tennis as her medium, made her own aesthetic intervention.) Poems can provide the effaced interiority of these caricatures, but the backlog of silenced persons is daunting and the history by no means safely concluded. And so Lewis's book begins with an aftermath, a morning-after poem, "Plantation," in which two lovers awake "embracing on the bare floor of a large cage," bound together by an intimacy that is concomitant with confided, and temporarily pardoned, shames:

To keep you happy, I decorated the bars.  
Because you had never been hungry, I knew

I could tell you the black side  
of my family owned slaves.

I realize this is perhaps  
the one reason why I love you,

because I told you this  
and you—still—wanted to kiss

me. We laughed when I said *plantation*,  
fell into our chairs when I said *cane*.

Those "bars," reflected in the couplets on the page, stand for the innate possessiveness of our gaze; the "you" whose happiness depends on the cage being made pretty is, partly, the reader, who is lured by beauty to the site of pain, and whose scrutinizing presence there turns a bedroom into a prison, or perhaps a zoo. Sex, far from being a reprieve from the humiliations of the past, expresses them; it promises to soar above social and historical identity, but it's more like an early Wright brothers plane, skipping and wobbling from one degradation to the next: the lover who laughs one minute, changes "every now and then" from "a prancing

*Lewis's catalogue of Western depictions of black women spans forty thousand years.*

black buck”—the white stereotype for black male sexual threat—to a “small high yellow girl: pigtailed, / patent leather, eyes spinning gossamer, begging / for egg salad and banana pudding.” Experience and innocence, the “black buck” and the light-skinned girl, are elements of a single racist trope, whose tensions well up in every act of tenderness:

And then you were fourteen, and you had  
grown  
a glorious steel cock under your skirt. To  
brag

you rubbed yourself against me. Then  
your tongue  
was inside my mouth, and I wanted to say

*Please ask me first*, but it was your  
tongue, so who cared suddenly

about your poor manners?

The poem gets progressively more nightmarish: the “tongue . . . inside my mouth” is an image for speech and for its effacement under circumstances that here seem ecstatic, there violent. Are these lovers, or successive versions of a single person, her sexuality tainted by history? By the end of the poem, both parties have suffered a grotesque, Ovidian transformation: “You said, *The bars look pretty, Baby*, / then rubbed your hind legs up against mine.”

Lewis is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Southern California with a fellowship in Poetry and Visual Studies, and those disciplines join together in her book’s title poem—seventy-nine pages long, including notes and appendices—which is itself made up entirely of the “titles, catalog entries, or exhibit descriptions” of objects in Western art that depict the black female form, going back to 38,000 B.C. The sheer bulk of material that Lewis turned up in her research, and the relentlessness of the descriptions, suggests that the history of the black female body is inextricable from the institutions that claim ownership of its depictions; the subjugation is translated into symbolic terms but never undone. Two haunting epigraphs hang over the poem: an announcement, from 1939, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s “Employees’ Association Minstrel Show and Dance,” and an inquiry

by one “Mrs. B. L. Blankenship,” who writes that she is “anxious to buy a small healthy negro girl—ten or twelve years old.” The latter confronts us with the outright barbarism of slavery and its attendant transactions, while the former suggests how thin a disguise racism must wear at any given moment, in any given cultural institution, to pass for what we optimistically call “culture.”

Poems describing works of art are nearly as old as poems and works of art. The name for this hoary genre is ekphrasis, though in Lewis’s hands its conventions are scrambled. The problem isn’t that the works of art are silent and need a voice; it’s that we encounter them inside institutions that title and describe them for us, pre-assigning them meaning. Poetry can’t imagine these artifacts from scratch, since their labels adhere so tenaciously to them. And so Lewis followed some stringent, self-imposed rules in composing this long poem, altering nothing about her source language except its punctuation. This puts extraordinary pressure on the fundamentals of prosody. Line breaks, stanza shapes, the management and distribution of words and silence—this small repertoire of formal options is here weaponized for maximum impact. The poem moves chronologically; this is a passage from one of its early sections, “Catalog I: Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome”:

Statuette of a Woman Reduced  
to the Shape of a Flat Paddle

Statuette of a Black Slave Girl  
Right Half of Body and Head Missing

Head of a Young Black Woman Fragment  
from a Statuette of a Black Dancing Girl

Lewis’s technique returns the humanity to these anonymous women, which, in turn, makes the objects depicting them feel like examples of, and even instruments of, real historical violence. In a gallery, it seems perfectly natural to see a woman missing her head and half of her body. Here, in a list that feels like a catalogue of atrocities, it’s nearly unbearable.

A later, formally inventive section divides women from the objects that embody them by a method of formal panning, where the residue of per-

sonhood is extracted and isolated on the page:

water jar

bowl

ointment spoon

in the form of swimming  
black girl

mirror  
with handle

in the form of a carved  
standing  
black girl

Since form is essentially neutral, its effects are wildly variable; in some instances, the technique redeems the women, who were literally objectified, but only, after all, by objectifying them in a different form. Separated from their subjects, these objects that have taken the shape of black women become formless: the poem’s own form corrects the problem by building a sombre temporal interval between object and person, as our eyes make their own voyage from the left to the right margin.

First books usually spend longer in the chrysalis than later books, and often feel more like finish lines than like starting blocks: a writer never again gets so much time off the clock. “Voyage of the Sable Venus” was made over roughly forty thousand years, if we take seriously Lewis’s continuum of historical and autobiographical time. In its final sections, many of the art works listed are by black women, including a “Venus of Compton,” whose presence suggests not only the tennis star but also Lewis’s own birth in that city. The effect is magical, a little like Hermione’s abrupt transformation, at the end of “The Winter’s Tale,” from statue to living woman. All those women made into serviceable, mute paddles and spoons, missing their limbs and heads, are, by the miracle of verbal art, restored. This may be one reason the poem is dedicated to “the legacy of black librarianship, and black librarians, worldwide”; something of their oblique, channelled genius, expressed in the social space of the library as a “collection” of books by others—black and white, dead and living—is here transferred to the aesthetic space of Lewis’s own many-chambered and remarkable collection. ♦



THE THEATRE

# MY GUY

*Sam Shepard's "Fool for Love."*

BY HILTON ALS



*Patti Smith and Sam Shepard at Sutter's Bakery, New York, circa 1971.*

For good or for ill, Sam Shepard is the most objectified male writer of his generation. People who have little interest in theatre have found themselves drawn to it, and to him, in part because of his looks, especially during the height of his fame as a screen actor. (He has appeared in more than forty movies and was nominated for an Oscar in 1984, for his performance in "The Right Stuff.")

Born Samuel Shepard Rogers VII in Fort Sheridan, Illinois, in 1943, Shepard spent much of his childhood on a ramshackle avocado ranch in Duarte, California. Loneliness permeated the Shepards' home. Samuel VI, an Army pilot turned schoolteacher, was an alcoholic and would disappear for days at a time. The surrounding landscape—Route 66, the dusty "Main Street of America," ran alongside Duarte—was not a comfort. Tall, slightly snaggletoothed, and eagle-eyed, Shepard always looked like America, or a movie version of America: one could easily imagine him playing Tom Joad

or Abraham Lincoln. His Western drawl was an additional attraction. Joan Didion's essay about the charisma of John Wayne could just as easily apply to Shepard:

He had a sexual authority so strong that even a child could perceive it. And in a world we understood early to be characterized by venality and doubt and paralyzing ambiguities, he suggested another world, one which may or may not have existed ever but in any case existed no more: a place where a man could move free, could make his own code and live by it; a world in which, if a man did what he had to do, he could one day take the girl and go riding through the draw and find himself home free.

Shepard moved to New York in 1963 and roomed, for a time, with a friend from Duarte—Charles Mingus III, the son of the storied jazz musician. From Mingus, a mixed-race kid who painted, Shepard learned that the more straitlaced the woman the more she was attracted to difference. "Charles had this knack of picking up these amazingly straight women—stewardesses and secretaries," Shepard said, in Don Shew-

ey's rich 1985 biography. "Charlie was always splattered with paint, and I didn't take too many baths back then. And there were cockroaches all over the place. But these women would show up in their secretarial gear."

Supporting himself as a security guard and a busboy, Shepard was encouraged to write plays by impresarios as diverse as Ellen Stewart, who established La MaMa, an experimental venue for new playwrights, in 1961, and Ralph Cook, who founded the Theatre Genesis, in 1964. They needed material, and the prolific Shepard soon needed as many stages as possible on which to present the voices he'd heard growing up—and the wound of rejection he'd experienced again and again in his own family.

Like many alcoholics, Shepard's father wasn't willing to share the stage, and, in a sense, Shepard's fifty-odd plays are a bid for his attention, albeit from a distance. As expressive as Shepard's characters are about their creator's interior life, they also stand guard between him and the hurting world. Many of Shepard's scripts—including "Buried Child" (1978) and "True West" (1980), both of which won the Pulitzer Prize, and "A Lie of the Mind" (1985)—are about the adhesions that bruise even as they hold together the writer's boozy, self-deluding, and crippled families. But some brilliant early works, such as "La Turista" (1967), Shepard's first full-length play, "Cowboy Mouth" (1971), the first production of which starred Shepard and his sometime paramour Patti Smith, and the astounding "The Tooth of Crime" (1972), have a sharper, more intense focus, on couples and coupling. In these plays, the atmosphere is electric with disasters that seem to unfold in slow motion, or in the time it takes Shepard's characters to express their hatred, longing, or disappointment, much the way drunks express themselves—through repetition.

In "La Turista," we meet an American couple, Salem and Kent, who are travelling in Latin America. The pair speak bad Spanish and complain about the locals. Both severely sunburned when we meet them, they talk about the pros and cons of different skin tones. In their jumble of specious theories,

what Kent and Salem share is their whiteness, which is to say their preconceptions about how and when the world turns. The aging rock star Hoss and the musical upstart Crow, in “The Tooth of Crime,” are white, too. But, more important, they’re male, and their masculinity informs all their actions. In the play’s second act, the two men have a verbal showdown, monitored by a referee. The argument, ultimately, is about how the younger artist must devour the older one in order to feed his own work, his own myths. Crow says, of Hoss, “Can’t get it together for all of his tryin’. Can’t get it together for fear that he’s dyin’. Fear that he’s crackin’ busted in two.”

The 1983 play “Fool for Love” (in revival at the Samuel J. Friedman and conscientiously directed by Daniel Aukin) displays all the skill that Shepard developed when crafting his longer family plays but sacrifices none of the intensity and oddness of the earlier work. The play is not so much about coupling as about the deep impulses that keep people together even when they’re apart. While writing “Fool for Love,” Shepard himself “busted in two,” in order to talk about objectification from both a male and a female point of view.

To look at Judy Linn’s 1971 photographs of Shepard (who was then married to the actress O-Lan Jones) with his lover Patti Smith, or to listen to Joni Mitchell’s 1976 song “Coyote,” which is ostensibly about the playwright—“There’s no comprehend-

ing/Just how close to the bone and the skin and the eyes/And the lips you can get/And still feel so alone/And still feel related”—is to witness something rare in American masculinity: a man who found in himself something those female artists could *use*. Shepard wasn’t averse to being taken over by a woman. (In a 1997 interview in *The Paris Review*, he said, “More than anything, falling in love causes a certain female thing in a man to manifest, oddly enough.”) Through these powerful women and their creativity, he experienced the very opposite of Dad’s disregard: validation and attention, the eyes of love that we all hope will help shape us.

Writing “Fool for Love,” during a time of emotional turmoil—Shepard’s marriage to Jones was dissolving, and he was falling for another actress, Jessica Lange, with whom he would be involved for almost thirty years—made him jumpy and suspicious of his work. “The play came out of falling in love,” he said, in *The Paris Review*. “It’s such a dumbfounding experience. In one way you wouldn’t trade it for the world. In another way it’s absolute hell.” The play, he added, baffled him. He felt close to his characters, the ex-lovers Eddie and May, but he didn’t know how to guide them satisfactorily for the stage, how to express what needed expressing:

I love the opening, in the sense that I couldn’t get enough of this thing between Eddie and May, I just wanted that to go on

and on and on. But I knew that was impossible. . . . I had mixed feelings about it when I finished. Part of me looks at “Fool for Love” and says, This is great, and part of me says, This is really corny. This is a quasirealistic melodrama. It’s still not satisfying; I don’t think the play really found itself.

But when does love find itself? Eddie (Sam Rockwell) loves May (Nina Arianda), but he’s no good when it comes to love’s realities, which include staying put until passion either deepens or withers into something else. He’s always looking for the high of love: desire is his drug. And that addiction can be pretty wearing on a practical girl like May. When Shepard introduces us to Eddie and May, they’re in their thirties, but their stop-and-start story began long before, when they were kids, really. Life has taught them a thing or two, not least how impossible their connection, or any intimacy, can be.

To escape Eddie’s ambivalence, his need for attention, and his endless bullshit, May has moved to a dingy motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert. She has just about caught her breath, started dating a nice guy named Martin (the sweet and stalwart Tom Pelphrey), and settled into a job as a restaurant cook, when Eddie shows up. He’s not interested in May’s urge to change her life; it doesn’t benefit him in any way, and he’s less of a person without her. The first words Eddie says are the words he thinks May wants to hear: “May, look. May? I’m not goin’ anywhere. See, I’m right here. I’m not gone.” May’s heard all that before. Still, she clings to him—literally—wrapping her arms around his legs as he speaks. Eddie digs her dependence—until he doesn’t. “Come on. You can’t just sit around here like this,” he says. “You want some tea? With lemon? Some Ovaltine?” May shakes her head. Outside, you can hear crickets singing in the night.

The dance of love and anger that Eddie and May are performing is choreographed; the furious partners know its steps. She knees him in the groin, and he falls to the floor. Recovering, he picks himself up and lays more charm over the hurt, like a kid holding a steak to a black eye. In jeans, boots, and a cowboy hat, Eddie is very confident when it comes to his charm:



*“An almond! I thought we’d agreed—nothing extravagant.”*



seduction is part of his lonesome-cowboy performance. Whether he's pacing around May's room or putting on his spurs to impress Martin, who shows up in the middle of this seventy-five-minute, Strindberg-like drama, he takes up a lot of psychic space.

Indeed, part of what May is fighting for is a little mental headroom. When she slams herself against a wall, she does so, in part, to set her incredulous brain straight: Did Eddie really say that? What does he want from her, now that he's sniffing around someone else? Eddie's other woman, whom May calls the Countess, hovers like a perfumed ghost over the couple's conversations. She's some sort of star—she was on the cover of a magazine, May tells us—and, although Eddie denies it, who else could own the huge black Mercedes-Benz that rolls up outside May's door about halfway through the story? She, for sure, doesn't know any women like that.

Even though May and Eddie are, for the most part, alone in her room, they're never really alone. Besides the Countess and Martin, there is someone else present: the Old Man (incredibly well played by Gordon Joseph Weiss). He may not be physically in the action, but psychically he's all over Eddie and May. For most of the play, he sits, in semi-darkness, downstage right, a short distance from May's bed and the red neon sign that flickers just outside her front door.

"Fool for Love" is a kind of existential boxing match, but the Old Man is no referee; he's grappling with his own problems and shadows. It turns out that Eddie and May are half siblings; the Old Man fathered them both, with different mothers, whom he abandoned. They are blood but also not blood. By the time they discovered this, it was too late. Love made them foolish, needy, bound by forces they couldn't explain:

I was in love, see. I'd come home after school, after being with Eddie, and I was filled with this joy. . . . All I could think of was him. . . . And all he could think of was me. Isn't that right, Eddie? We couldn't take a breath without thinking of each other. We couldn't eat if we weren't together. We couldn't sleep. We got sick at night when we were apart. Violently sick. And my mother



*"What do you think—capitalize 'Me'? Or too much?"*

even took me to see a doctor. And Eddie's mother took him to see the same doctor but the doctor had no idea what was wrong with us.

Love also made them unsympathetic to their own mothers' grief. May's need to escape Eddie is also a need to escape her mother's devastation—"Her eyes looked like a funeral"—but who ever achieves that?

Shepard adores May. You can feel him sitting back and wondering at her practical matter-of-factness; it makes him starry with longing, with words. "Fool for Love" begins as the story of a man's seduction and betrayal, but it ends up being dominated by a woman's truth-telling. The play reminds me of another Joan Didion remark: that, in the West, "men tend to shoot, get shot, push off, move on. Women pass down stories."

Arianda and Rockwell pass down Shepard's story in unexpected ways that are informed by their lionhearted fearlessness when it comes to failing. To understand Eddie and May is to understand that it's nearly impossible to get those characters "right"; as written, they keep drifting, losing ground, walking away, or rushing toward emotions that Shepard treats like dunes of beautiful shifting Mojave sand. The only way to nail the doomed couple is to play them the way a jazz master plays a tune: differ-

ently from day to day, from moment to moment. I saw two performances of the play, and could have seen more, in order to appreciate the nuances that Arianda and Rockwell added or took away each time. At one performance, the energy was down, and Rockwell did everything he could to rev up the proceedings. Arianda, during the other show, created an atmosphere that explained, through movement and action, who May really was: a mother to the boy in Eddie—the only parent who could understand him. The actors did nothing for show, because they couldn't: for all its high drama, the script demands an incredible level of focus and concentration that isn't about "acting"—it's organic. As May packed a suitcase and walked through the door at the end of the play, it wasn't hard to imagine her meeting her literary predecessor out there in the dark world: the dogged Lena, in William Faulkner's "Light in August." You remember Lena's great moment: she has just given birth to the child of her feckless lover, who immediately runs off. Staring after him, Lena tells herself, "Now I got to get up again." ♦

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NEATEST TRICK OF THE WEEK

*Headline in the Philadelphia Daily News.*

VICTIM TESTIFIES AT MURDER TRIAL

## AMERICA AT THE EDGES

*Shows by Jim Shaw and Maureen Gallace.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

*A revolt against pieties: Shaw's "Appliance Big Foot Parting the Red Sea" (2013).*

Perhaps the strangest of the many strange things about the jam-packed Jim Shaw retrospective at the New Museum is its equanimity. Chipper dispassion plays like dappled sunlight across the Los Angeles-based artist's determinedly freaky works—hundreds of drawings, paintings, collages, doctored photographs, videos—which are accompanied by pieces from his own collections of amateur paintings and crackpot-Christian and conspiracy-mongering tracts, books, banners, and other printed materials. The show's title, "The End Is Here," functions more as a carnival barker's come-on than as the panic button it suggests. This surprised me. Having long followed Shaw's torrential lumpen-Surrealist output, I fancied that it must flow from a heart of hysteria, if not of darkness. But Shaw turns out to be an even-tempered connoisseur of eccentricities—including his own, which he mines in comic-strip-like illustrations of his dreams. They are bizarre and often erotic in the way of anyone's

dreams, but he makes no evident claim that they are especially interesting, except as another—and, in this case, cost-free—species of crazy collectibles. (The most economical way of acquiring things is to make them yourself.) I have always deemed Shaw an important artist, although I was never sure why. Now I assess him as an epoch-defining aficionado of the very best in American bad taste.

Originally from Midland, Michigan, Shaw fatefully met the artist Mike Kelley at the University of Michigan, in the early nineteen-seventies. "We were the two weirdest kids there," Shaw told me, at the museum. They helped start a chaotic rock band, Destroy All Monsters, then enrolled as graduate students at the avant-gardish California Institute of the Arts, in 1976, initiating what might be called the punkification of contemporary art: a plunge into the nerdish, scatological, and abject nether regions of popular culture. They pitted their work against the reigning elegan-

cies of abstraction, minimalism, and conceptual art. "Pants Shitter & Proud," an early textile banner by Kelley, the alpha of the pair, read. (Shaw told me, "Mike was the Cisco Kid. I was more like Pancho.") Kelley, who died, an apparent suicide, in 2012, channelled the rage of an unhappy Catholic working-class childhood with phenomenal inventiveness, critical intelligence, and black humor. You can see his masterpiece, an assemblage titled "More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid," at the Whitney Museum; a show at Hauser and Wirth presents his last major work, a cavernous installation of glowing imaginary cities, inspired by Superman mythology, and a hard-to-watch video of a sadomasochistic playlet.

The blast of fetid air from Kelley and Shaw, in association with the older Los Angeles provocateur sculptor Paul McCarthy, shook the art world. Critics vied to name the movement. "Just Pathetic," coined in 1990 by the curator Ralph Rugoff, caught on, briefly. My proposal, "The New Low," went nowhere. It is to the art's honor that it defeated categorization, leading a revolt against the pieties of both art-schooled high art and sixties idealisms. The work exalted misfits, such as Billy, the incurable adolescent who is the hapless hero of Shaw's voluminous series "My Mirage" (1986–91). Comic strips and psychedelia in a potpourri of styles borrowed from modern art and commercial design—Edvard Munch, Peter Max—track Billy's excursions into the sixties counterculture, which he ultimately abandons for a wacky variant of evangelical Christianity. Religion is a recurring target for both Kelley and Shaw: bitterly in Kelley's case, wonderingly in Shaw's. Shaw went as far as to invent a sect, supposedly contemporaneous with the rise of Mormonism: O-ism, the worship of a goddess who must not be named.

At the New Museum, you can immerse yourself, to the point of exhaustion, in the swampy logics of this and of actual faiths. Want to know the roots of the ill-starred Branch Davidians? They're here, as are images and exegeses of the relic sacred to J.F.K.—assassination adepts: the Zapruder film. Shaw's fascination with didactic religiousities, from fundamentalism to cults, only seems satirical. Satire requires an



appeal to reason, for which he evinces no use; rather, he empathizes with any attempt to slip the material coils of existence, even as he revels in expressing our post-Edenic disarray. He is a Gnostic manqué, perhaps.

But Shaw envisions human grotesquerie and folly with placid detachment, altering photographs of perfectly nice people to turn them into ogres, and making remorselessly vulgar mashups of classical and popular art forms. One big work, "The Deluge" (2014), painted on a stage backdrop of a harbor scene, combines stormy clouds from a Leonardo da Vinci drawing with images of Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint, from "North by Northwest." The actors blend with a giant hand derived from the old Yellow Pages ads that urged, "Let your fingers do the walking." Another piece, "Labyrinth: I Dreamt I was Taller than Jonathan Borofsky" (2009)—the title refers to another dream-inspired artist—is a huge installation of backdrops and standing wooden cutouts, painted in an expert pastiche of styles, from Picasso's, in "Guernica," to those of the editorial cartoonists Thomas Nast and Herblock. "Labyrinth" incorporates allusions to the history of political corruption and violence, though the effect is vitiated by such antic distractions as a wafting Casper the Friendly Ghost in the panoramic paintings that surround it. Throughout the show, elements in Shaw's agglomeration of symbols may excite amused if not queasy recognitions. But their meanings are opaque, secreting things that the artist knows and that we, short of a born-again revelation, will never find out.


I love the tiny landscape paintings of Maureen Gallace, currently on view at the 303 Gallery, so intensely that it worries me. Since the early nineteen-nineties, Gallace, who is from Connecticut and earned an M.F.A. at Rutgers University, in 1983, has been refreshing jaded art-world eyes with slightly abstracted views of New England cottages and barns, empty roads, and unpeopled beaches. She won fans early on with her work's retro look and exaggerated modesty. Though the appeal seemed self-conscious and a bit fey, it was fun, on days of gallery-going in Chelsea, to find yourself looking at her pictures of

blocky, featureless little houses in vestigial, woodsy terrain. Then, in recent years, something started to take hold: a charm so powerful that it reordered my sense of what contemporary painting can be. The crux is a mind's surrender to—for want of a more precise word—nature, both external and internal to the artist.

Gallace's means are narrow: she employs uniformly quick, daubed brushwork and colors kept to a mid-range of tones that makes whites jump out. Her end is description, not of how things look but of how they seem. What is a breaking ocean wave like? Gallace answers with stabs of creamy off-white and gray-blue shadow. It's her best guess, as is the specific blue of the sky on the given day. In one picture, single blue strokes approximate tidal pools. Elsewhere, a slight touch of green in the sea hints at fathomless depths. Qualities of light, too, feel gamely speculative. (To me, they tend to evoke morning hours, when the visible world, well rested, has something almost eager about it.) The houses often lack doors and windows. Gallace is plainly shy of anyone or anything that might even seem to return her gaze. She conveys a vulnerable aloneness wholly given over to absorption in appearances. Looking at the paintings, I feel that I am always just beginning to look.

Besides suggesting kinships to Edward Hopper's scenes of solitude and the meditative still-lives of the Italian modern master Giorgio Morandi, Gallace's way of painting—it hardly seems a style—has affinities with a New York tradition of painterly realism that was developed in the nineteen-fifties by Fairfield Porter and pursued by, among others, Jane Freilicher and Lois Dodd. But Gallace seems less to revive that impulse than to arrive at its basis, in a view of modern art that values the visual poetics of life observed in the living of it. (Porter, a superb critic as well as artist, liked to argue that modernism went astray by hewing to Cézanne rather than to Vuillard.) This accounts for the surprising force of her pictures. The effect is like a fresh invention of perceptual landscape painting, as if there had been no thought of it before. My joy in it may abate with time, but right now I want to launch a small, considerably quiet firework in Gallace's honor. ♦

*Time Flies*  
by Alex Kaufman



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## WONDER BOYS

*"Steve Jobs" and "Pan."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

The assumption behind "Steve Jobs" is that the launch of a new computer has the combined effect of a Mahler symphony, a simultaneous orgasm, and a personal visit from the angel Gabriel. This could well be true. Indeed, so true is it to Apple users everywhere that the film's director, Danny Boyle, and the screenwriter, Aaron Sorkin, have built

Thomas Pynchon, though it is scarcely touched on here; nor is Jobs's affair with Joan Baez.) The appearance of the movie is a kind of Apple-flavored homage, shifting from grainy and homespun 16-mm. footage to a digital *froideur*, as if the ghost of Jobs, who died in 2011, were buffing the edges of the work that bears his name.



*Michael Fassbender in a film written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Danny Boyle.*

their tale around not one but three separate launches: first, of the Macintosh, in 1984; second, of the NeXT cube, whatever that was, in 1988; and last—behold, my people—of the iMac, in 1998.

Jobs is played by Michael Fassbender, who sets out in a blue blazer and green bow tie, and distills himself, over time, into the guru of legend, complete with the monkish haircut and the black turtleneck. We also get brief, occasional flashbacks to the younger Jobs, when he was still just a hippie in a garage, teamed with his pal Steve Wozniak (Seth Rogen) and tinkering the notion of a personal computer into existence. (The seeping of West Coast counter-culture into the zealotry of tech is a weird historical osmosis, worthy of

The principal source of the film is the biography of Jobs by Walter Isaacson—an exemplary book, not least because it keeps its head while all those whom it describes are losing theirs. That is not the attitude of Sorkin and Boyle, who opt for what you might call expressionist compression. For instance, Jobs had a child named Lisa, born in 1978, and for years he struggled to admit openly that he was her father, even after the case was proved by a paternity test. The saga is distressing, and, although it was peaceably resolved in the end, it is still wielded as Exhibit A by anyone wishing to claim that Jobs was morally warped. "Steve Jobs" bolsters this contention by having Lisa's mother, Chrisann Brennan (Katherine Waterston),

show up, with Lisa in tow, at the earliest launch, like *Maleficent* at the baptism of *Sleeping Beauty*. Brennan rails at Jobs, pointing out that she is on welfare while he is worth more than four hundred million dollars. The trouble is that she *keeps* showing up at the launches, as Jobs is busy correcting the final kinks in his presentation. You can see why Sorkin and Boyle engineer this coincidence, repeatedly soldering together the private and public manias of their central character, and thus allowing the dramatic charge to flow. Stand back, however, and such hard rewiring of the facts doesn't look quite so clever and intense. It looks silly.

Something similar happens at the board meeting, in 1985, where Jobs is shorn of his executive powers. Board members side with the less mercurial John Sculley (Jeff Daniels), the C.E.O. of Apple. The movie itself, though, sides with Jobs, less in the weighing of the arguments—Sorkin is happiest when the pit-a-pat of conversation quickens into the rat-a-tat of a battle royal—than in the styling of the clash. It happens during yet another flashback, in the small hours, with rain bathing the windows like floods of tears. The protagonists are filmed at freakish angles, and the shadows of the window frames cast doomy diagonals. I hate to ask, but is it not common practice, at the board meetings of major organizations, to turn on an overhead light? Did Jobs object to the insufficiently soft click of the switch, or what?

The echo, here, is of "Citizen Kane," where the camera cranes over a rooftop and down through a skylight, in a weltering storm. If Boyle borrows from the most lauded film of all time, it's because his own movie addresses the most exhaustively lauded theme of our own time. Within the frantic mythology of business, the ejection of Jobs has acquired the sheen of a fable; his mortification led not merely to a bounce back but to a resurrection, and thence to the iWorld that we are blessed to inhabit today. The fabling began with Jobs's commencement speech at Stanford, in 2005, when he spoke about leaving Apple: "I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over." Two other things should be noted about that speech. First, according to



Isaacson, whom did Jobs, nervous at the prospect of writing it, contact for professional help? Aaron Sorkin. Nothing came of that request, reportedly, and Jobs composed the speech himself. Second, he declared at the outset, “Today I want to tell you three stories from my life. That’s it. No big deal. Just three stories.” Pretty much like the movie we have now.

Buttressed by Fassbender, who is as meticulous as ever, “Steve Jobs” delivers what has become a standard dichotomy: Jobs could be a monster, but he was also a genius. We don’t see him—to pick just a couple of the childish sins anthologized by Isaacson—attending a Halloween party dressed as Jesus, or regularly parking athwart *two* parking spaces for the disabled, but don’t worry, there is plenty of crappy behavior to gawk at. Jobs chews out the hapless Wozniak (a better writer of code and an infinitely nicer human), in public, from the stage of an auditorium, just to ram home the execration. Yet not for a minute are we invited to doubt that Jobs was, in the long run, right, and that he belongs in the company of those famed achievers—Einstein, Gandhi, and so on—who littered Apple’s “Think Different” campaign. The dichotomy turns out to be a false one: whether you revile him or genuflect before him, you are still implying that the guy demands and deserves our fascination. What Sorkin and Boyle have to offer is not a warts-and-all portrait but the suggestion that there is something heroic about a wart.

As a result, despite the lunging modernity of the products on display, “Steve Jobs” comes across as strangely old-fashioned in this romantic insis-

tence on its hero. It veers closer to “Lust for Life,” Vincente Minnelli’s bio-pic of van Gogh, than to “The Social Network,” which was also scripted by Sorkin, but which steered us through the ventures of Mark Zuckerberg—no less labyrinthine than those of Jobs—with clarity and calm. Not once in that film did we feel ourselves baffled or trapped, whereas the corporate tangles in “Steve Jobs” grow dangerously dense. The best reason to see it is Kate Winslet: she plays Joanna Hoffman, who was a wizard of Apple marketing and one of the few hardy souls who could stand up to Jobs. Bit by bit, armed with large spectacles, a punchy accent, and dark unlovely hair, she becomes the movie’s anchor, quelling its tonal excesses much as Hoffman reined in the savage temper of Jobs. Yet even she, with her wisdom and her poise, is cast in the role of disciple; having chided Jobs for his treatment of Lisa and Chrisann, she still fusses over him before he goes onstage, pats him tenderly, and says, “Now go put a dent in the universe.” Yeah, yeah. Try telling that to Einstein.

The most cheering surprise of the season is “Pan.” No more juice, one might suppose, could be squeezed from the fruits of J. M. Barrie’s inspiration. Surely we must be Panned out. Yet here is Joe Wright’s new film, which reaches back to a story behind the story and finds Peter (Levi Miller), an orphan boy, plucked from his bed, in a sort of anti-Rapture, and hauled up into an airborne pirate ship. The setting is not the Edwardian London of the Darling family but the London of the Second

World War, and the ship is instantly caught in a dogfight with British Spitfires, firing its cannons through the clouds. By any decent logic, such brazen mashing of genres and time periods should not work. But it does.

The captain of the vessel is Blackbeard (Hugh Jackman). He is pilfering kids and spiriting them to Neverland, where they toil in mines, chipping away for pixum—a glowing fairy treasure, which Blackbeard smokes, through a creepy mask, in a bid for rejuvenation. Pirate crack! Peter flies and flees, aided by a brawny American named James Hook (Garrett Hedlund), who has two complete arms and buckets of pep. Together, they make for the tribal village, swoon over Tiger Lily (Rooney Mara), and plot the thorough trouncing of the villain. “Not large and sprawly, you know, with tedious distances between one adventure and another, but nicely crammed”: such was Barrie’s own account of Neverland, and “Pan”—Wright’s best film so far, livelier and more disloyal to its source than “Atonement” or “Pride and Prejudice”—crams without a care. The outcome is that increasing rarity, a proper children’s film; even the tears are well earned. The climax takes place inside a mountain of pixum, yet the true highlight is Jackman, a splendid blend of the wheedling, the mournful, the murderous, and the throw-away. “Childhood isn’t so jolly,” he says. “In fact, it’s rather frightening.” All the more so if you never grow up. ♦

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**NEWYORKER.COM**

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Benjamin Schwartz, must be received by Sunday, October 18th. The finalists in the October 5th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 2nd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"Your sins are forgiven, but not your co-pay."*  
Arthur Silverman, Frederick, Md.



### THE FINALISTS

*"I can't believe you used that line to get me in here."*  
Karen Sternhell, Berkeley, Calif.

*"I'm faking it."*  
Brian More, Rolling Hills Estates, Calif.

*"You really would rather be fishing."*  
Aaron Fagan, Monroe, Conn.

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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FP

5:19 PM

*The moment you "Rose"  
to the occasion.*

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